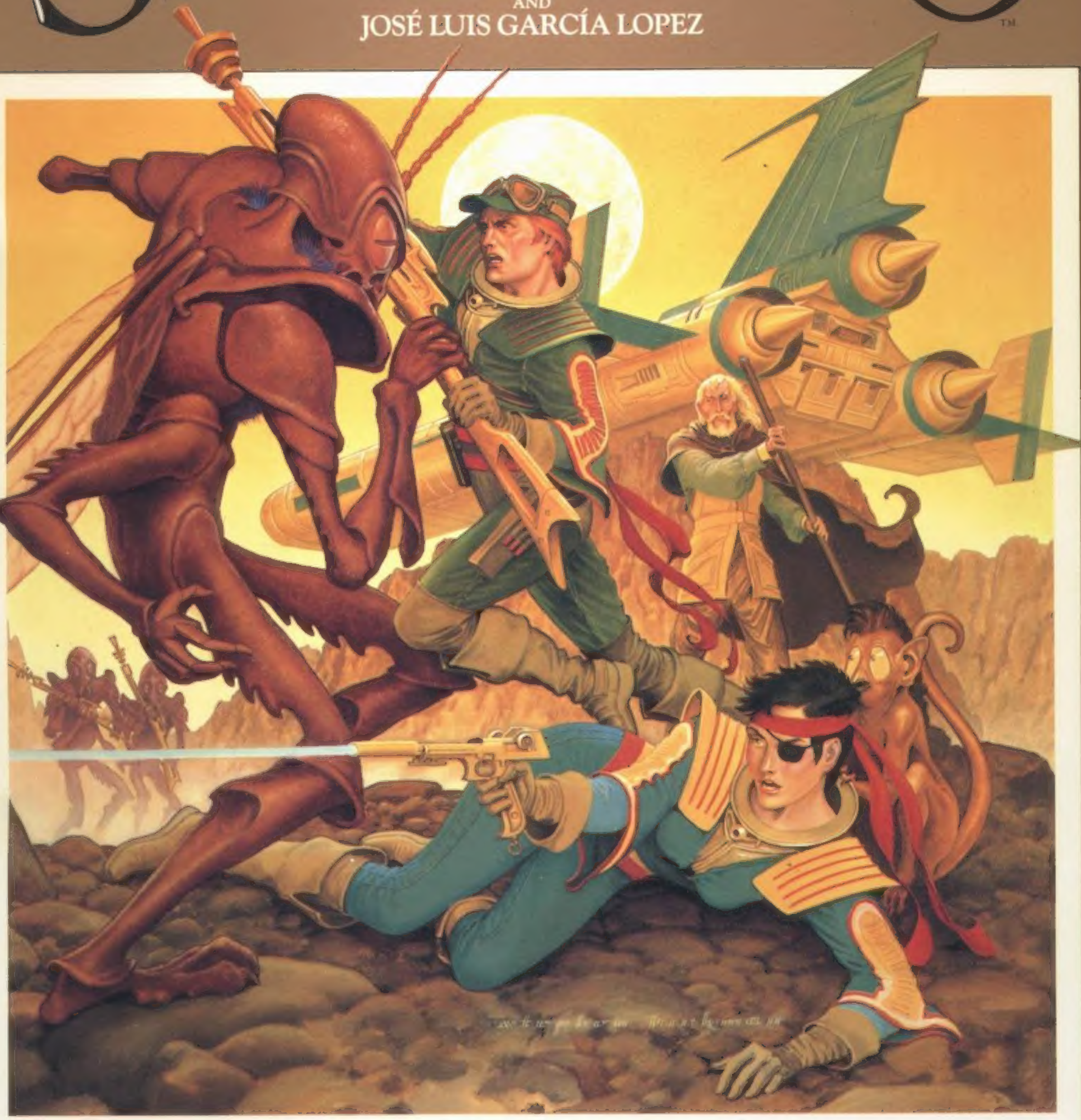
GRAPHIC NOVEL NO. 1

$6.95

STAR RAIDERS™

BY
ELLIOT S! MAGGIN
AND
JOSÉ LUIS GARCÍA LOPEZ



STAR·RAIDERS

ELLIOT S! MAGGIN
WRITER

JOSÉ LUIS GARCÍA LOPEZ
ARTIST

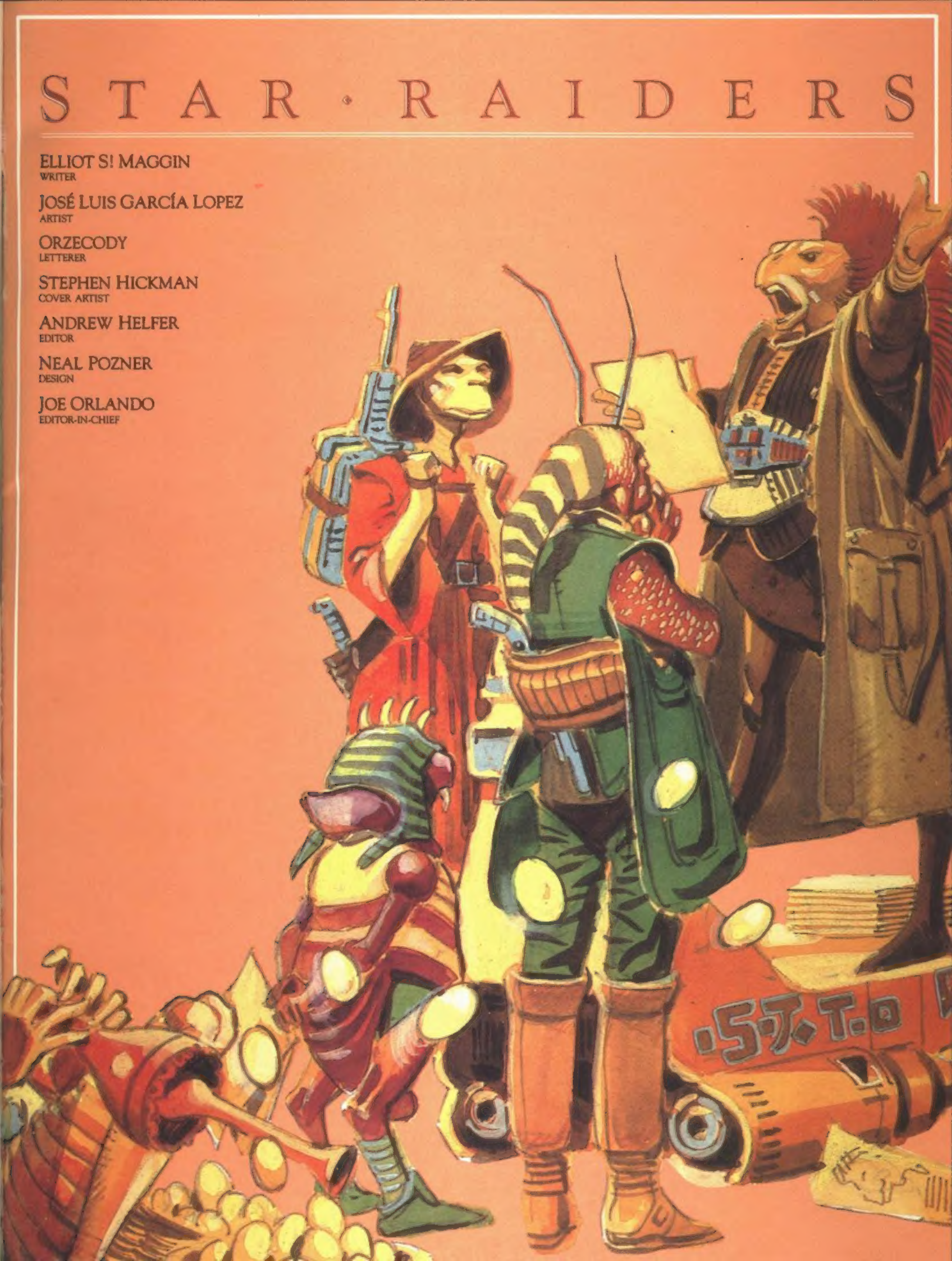
ORZECODY
LETTERER

STEPHEN HICKMAN
COVER ARTIST

ANDREW HELFER
EDITOR

NEAL POZNER
DESIGN

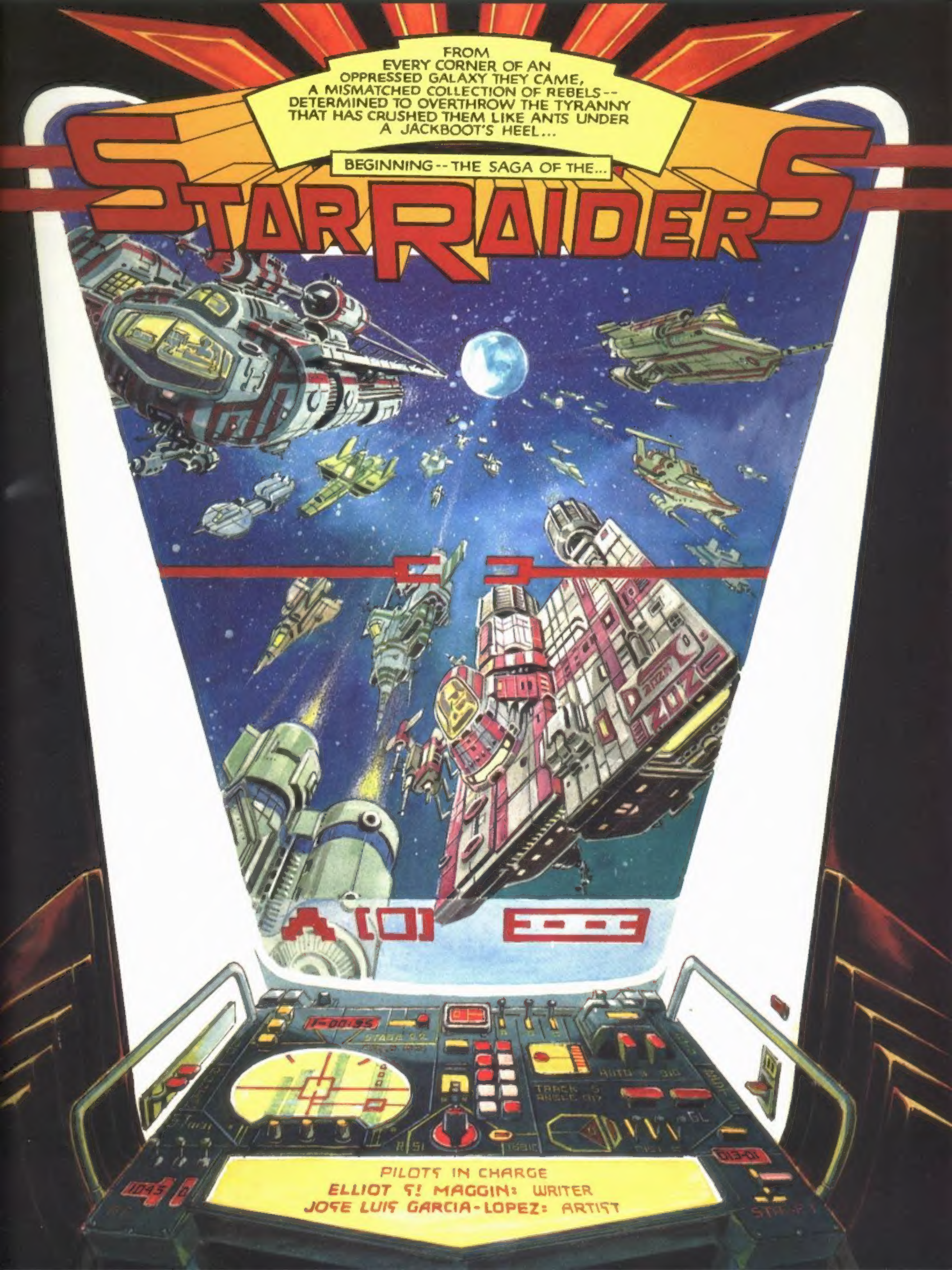
JOE ORLANDO
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



FROM
EVERY CORNER OF AN
OPPRESSED GALAXY THEY CAME,
A MISMATCHED COLLECTION OF REBELS--
DETERMINED TO OVERTHROW THE TYRANNY
THAT HAS CRUSHED THEM LIKE ANTS UNDER
A JACKBOOT'S HEEL...

BEGINNING--THE SAGA OF THE...

STAR RAIDERS



PILOTS IN CHARGE
ELLIOT S! MAGGIN: WRITER
JOSE LUIS GARCIA-LOPEZ: ARTIST

A MOMENT AGO THERE WAS THUNDER ROLLING ACROSS THIS BARREN PLACE...

...THE ROAR OF A MIGHTY STARSHIP CHARGING OFF FOR DIMENSIONS YET UNKNOWN...

NOW THE ECHO SUBSIDES AND THE NATIVE DENIZENS OF THIS PLACE SLOWLY, WARILY RECLAIM THEIR HOME...

TAR-EE?

...AND WONDER JUST WHAT IT WAS THAT HAPPENED HERE MOMENTS AGO...

TAR-EE!

TAR-EE FORS!

TEL ZEEK!

...MOMENTS AGO, THIS WORLD WAS A BEACH-HEAD IN THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE FORCES OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT--

--BETWEEN THE FORCES OF TYRANNY AND VALIANT RESISTANCE...

TEL ZEEK!

TAR-EE FORS!

...BUT BENEATH THIS BATTLE-SCARRED PLAIN--

--A LAST REMAINING FREE MAN LIVES HIS LIFE BY HIS OWN RULES...

...DAY BY DAY!

EZEKIEL C. VICKER
ONLY CHIEF LIBRARIAN

ZEEK!

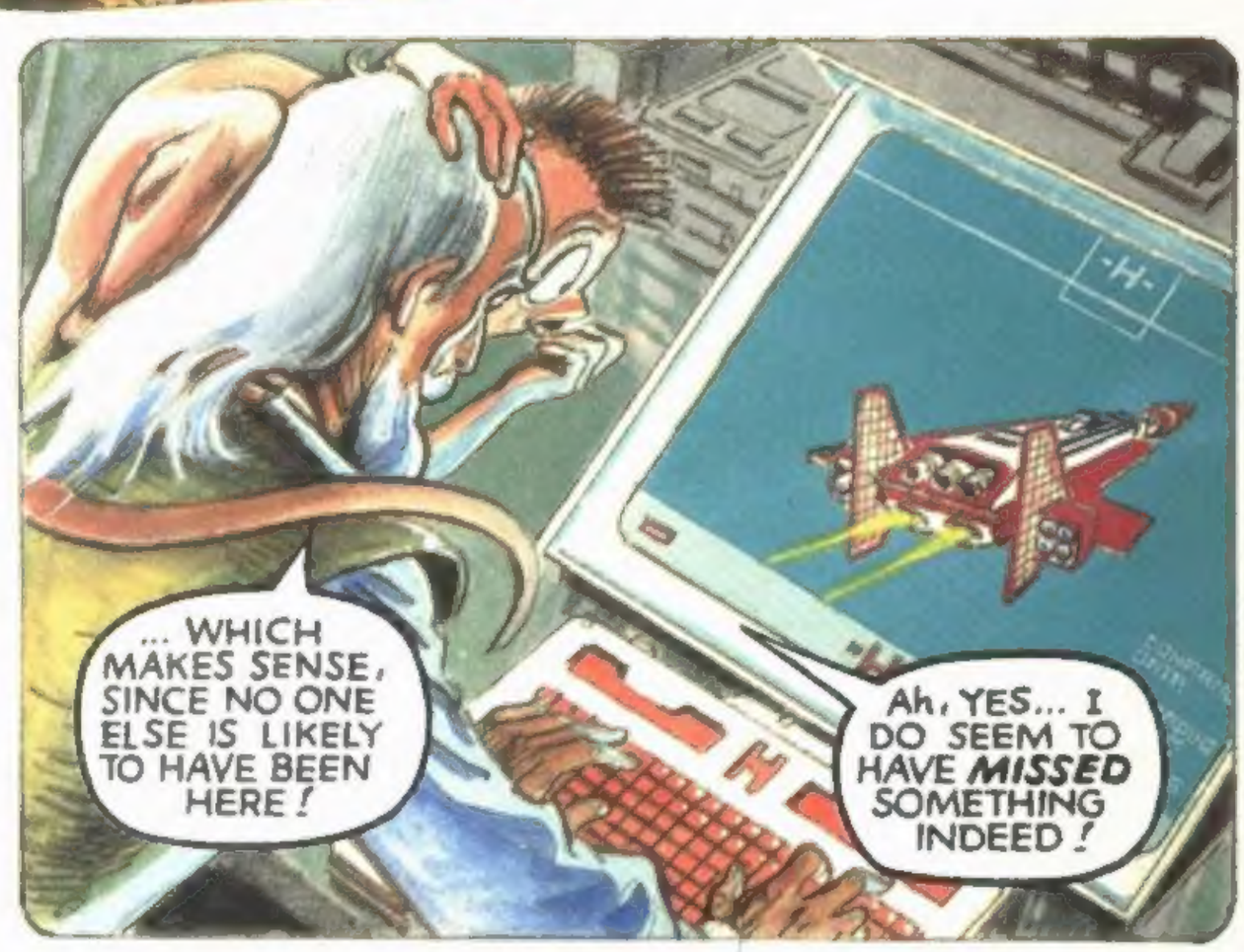
TEL ZEEK!

Tar-ee fors, zeek...
zeek...?

SOME SORT OF TO-DO ON THE SURFACE, YOU SAY?
TAR-EE...? ATARI FORCE!
WHAT'S AN ATARI FORCE, FOR THE LORD'S SAKE--?

I SUPPOSE IT'D BE A GOOD IDEA TO SEE WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON WHILE I WAS NAPPING--
--BY PLAYING BACK MY LITTLE SURFACE MONITOR...

...IF I CAN MANAGE TO FIND THE BLESSED THING UNDER THIS PILE OF--
--ah, YES INDEED! HERE IT IS, RIGHT WHERE I LEFT IT...


... WHICH MAKES SENSE, SINCE NO ONE ELSE IS LIKELY TO HAVE BEEN HERE!
Ah, YES... I DO SEEM TO HAVE MISSED SOMETHING INDEED!

MEANWHILE, CAREENING THROUGH A NEIGHBORING SECTOR OF SPACE AT HYPER-WARP SPEED IS ANOTHER, ALBEIT SMALLER, STAR CRUISER...
JED, CAN'T THIS CRATE MOVE ANY FASTER?
ONLY IF YOU GET OUT AND PUSH IT, WOMAN!

MY, MY--WE ARE GETTING TOUCHY, AREN'T WE, CAPTAIN?

JUST BUTTON UP AND DO YOUR JOB, NAVIGATOR!

PULLING RANK NOW, ARE WE, CAPTAIN...?

SEEMS LIKE JUST YESTERDAY ON SIGMA SIX THAT *RANK* WAS THE *LAST* THING ON YOUR MIND!

MUST'VE BEEN DRUNK! PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR SCREEN... HOW'S THAT ***DISTURBANCE*** ON THE THIRD PLANET SHAPING UP?

'FRAID IT'S NOT, MON CAPITAINE-- SEEMS TO HAVE PETERED OUT!

DAMN!

WE'RE LEAVING HYPERSPACE, JED... BRACE FOR FINAL APPROACH!

AND BELOW THE SURFACE OF THE EMBATTLED WORLD THAT THE PAIR IS APPROACHING...

MY, MY, THOSE ARE INDEED ZYLONS INVOLVED IN THAT BATTLE...

...AND THESE MUST BE THE ONES YOU CALL THE ***ATARI FORCE,*** YES?

Hmm -- YOU MEAN ***THESE*** BLOW-DRIED, SQUEAKY-CLEAN TYPES ARE THE ONES WHO COMMANDEERED OUR ***STAR RAIDER*** TO FIGHT THE ZYLONS?

HARDLY SEEMS POSSIBLE-- BUT THE ZYLONS HAVE AGAIN CHANCED UPON OUR HUMBLE LITTLE PLANET--

-- A RETURN VISIT... AFTER SNUFFING OUT VIRTUALLY ALL LIFE FROM THIS PLANET SO MANY YEARS AGO?

YES INDEED!

BUT ALL THEIR APPREHENSION COULD HARDLY PREPARE THEM FOR THIS LATEST VISITATION--

TWO PANELS SPRING UP FROM THE COCKPIT OF THE COOLING CRAFT AND...
TOMMY-- WHERE'S THE ACTION--?
WOULD YOU SETTLE FOR A GAME OF JACKS?

SAY-- WHAT'S THAT?
I'LL FIND OUT--
HEY, MACK! YEAH, YOU THERE!... FRONT AND CENTER, OLD MAN!

WHAT'RE YOU LOOKIN' FOR, MACK, AND WHO THE DEVIL ARE YOU?
I'M LOOKING FOR ZYLONS, IF YOU MUST KNOW...
... AND WHILE MY NAME DOESN'T MUCH MATTER ANYMORE, I WISH YOU WOULDN'T CALL ME MACK--

LISTEN, YOU SKINNY GOON, IF YOU DON'T GIVE ME A STRAIGHT ANSWER I'LL--
DON'T YOU SEE THE OLD MAN ISN'T IMPRESSED BY YOUR ARROGANCE, J.P.?
HE'S A RATHER CHARMING FELLOW, ACTUALLY...

...BUT WHAT I WANT TO KNOW, SIR, IS HOW YOU SURVIVED ON AN OTHERWISE DEAD WORLD--
BY REMAINING ALONE, DEAR LADY-- NOW PLEASE EXCUSE ME WHILE I GO--

--GO NOWHERE, MACK!
OH MY...!

JED!!
OH PLEASE, SIR, DON'T TAKE OFFENSE--I'M AFRAID HE HAD A BIT TOO MUCH TO DRINK LAST NIGHT!
I'M TOMORROW HARDTACK--CALL ME TOMMY!
YES, WELL, I'M EZEKIEL VICKER--

--HE CAN CALL ME SIR!
I JUST HOPE HE DOESN'T GET THE CHANCE TO CALL ME OFTEN!
LISTEN, COMEDIAN...

...WE CAME HERE BECAUSE WE GOT A READOUT OF A BATTLE GOING ON HERE--
--AND I'M BETTING YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED!

YOU SAY THERE WERE ZYLONS INVOLVED? WHO ELSE?
A GROUP CALLING THEMSELVES THE ATARI FORCE WAS HERE--FIVE PEOPLE BEAT A TROOP OF ZYLONS!

SURE, MACK, A GROUP OF MYTHICAL TIME TRAVELERS WAS HERE AND YOU SAW THEM, RIGHT?
EXCUSE ME, TOMMY--MAYBE I'LL BE BACK...

...WHEN YOUR FRIEND LEARNS HIS MANNERS!
PLEASE DON'T GO, Mr. VICKER--!

AND THE RANKLING CONTINUES AS...
... JED'S JUST TRYING TO MAKE LIFE DIFFICULT FOR THE ZYLONS! PLEASE DON'T GO BEFORE--
--BEFORE HE MAKES LIFE MORE DIFFICULT FOR ME? SORRY--
MUNSTA!
ZEEK!
ZEEK! ZEEK!

WHAT THE DEVIL ARE THESE MANGY ANIMALS SO HOT ABOUT?
THESE HUKKAS HAVE A GOOD DEAL TO TEACH YOU ABOUT BEING CIVILIZED!
TOMMY-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THAT--

I'VE NEVER SEEN A ZYLON UP CLOSE--
NO--!
--BUT I'M BETTING THAT'S WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE!

YOU KEEP ZYLONS AS PETS TOO, YOU SON OF A PIG?
URGFPHH!

FIND COVER, TOMMY...
...I'LL DEAL WITH THIS BABY!
DON'T BET ON IT!

THOSE TWO KIDS WILL GET THEMSELVES TORN APART--
-- AND TAKE THIS WHOLE BLASTED PLANET WITH THEM!

THE ZYLON BEATS THE WOMAN TO HER PISTOL, BUT NOT QUICKLY ENOUGH--
--TO AVOID HAVING JEDEDIAH POOLE KNOCK IT FREE AGAIN...
... AT SOME PAINFUL COST TO THE ANGRY REBEL...
YEOW!!
WHAT HAS THAT MONSTER GOT--AN EXOSKELETON?
IT'S LIKE HAVING A FIGHT WITH A BOULDER!
THE ZYLON'S TOO FAST--
WATCH YOURSELF, CAPTAIN!
I DON'T NEED ANY HELP...
...AVOIDING BLASTER FIRE!
THANK YOU, HOWEVER...
... FOR GIVING ME AN OPENING!
JED -- I'VE GOT TO RECHARGE THIS VAPORIZER AND DON'T HAVE THE TIME! -- OH...
PLEASANT DREAMS, ZYLON SCUM!

WITH SUCH GUSTO DID THE PAIR FIGHT S'DE BY SIDE THAT ONE CAN ALMOST FEEL THE DIS-APPOINTMENT--
--WHEN THE PILE OF DEBRIS AND BROKEN BUILDING STOPS THE ZYLON AND THE BATTLE IS APPARENTLY ENDED..

...AND ONE CAN SENSE THE EXCITED ANTICIPATION AS THE DEBRIS SEEMS FOR A MOMENT TO SHUDDER AND...
HEADS UP, JED--!
JUST KEEP YOUR HANDS FILLED, TOMMY--!

PROTECT YOURSELF, TOMMY--
--AND STAY CLEAR OF THE FLYING RUBBLE!
AS SOON AS YOU GET A GOOD BEAD ON THE THING...

...THEN FIRE!

GOOD JOB, TOMMY!
THAT'S FIGHTING WITH OUR HEADS!
... AND THINKING WITH YOUR POSTERIORS!

OH... EZEKIEL! JED DIDN'T MEAN TO HURT YOU BEFORE! HE--

I'LL DO MY OWN APOLOGIZING, NAVIGATOR, WHEN I FEEL IT IS WARRANTED!

APOLOGY OR NO, WE HAVE A PROBLEM, YOU AND I...

Y'KNOW, MY INTEREST IN YOUR PROBLEMS IS RAPIDLY DECLINING, JACK!

IF YOU'LL ALLOW SOMEONE ELSE'S MOUTH TO FLAP FOR AWHILE--

--YOU MIGHT LEARN SOMETHING! YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT ONE THING--I'M OLD... OLDER THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE!

"I'M NOT SURE HOW LONG AGO IT WAS--SIX OR EIGHT HUNDRED YEARS OR SO--WHEN THE ZYLONS LET LOOSE THEIR LIFE-KILLING HOLOCAUST HERE...

"... BUT I WAS UNDERGROUND AT THE TIME, IN THE DEEPEST VAULT OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY WHERE I NOW LIVE--PROTECTED BY LOTS OF THE BEST INSULATOR THERE IS--PAPER!

"Oh, THE HUKKAS SURVIVED--THEIR GENETIC MAKEUP PROTECTED THEM--AND THERE WERE A FEW OTHERS SHELTERED AS I WAS...

"... BUT THE DIFFERENCE CAME THE DAY I GOT TOO STIR-CRAZY TO CARE WHETHER IT WAS ALL RIGHT ON THE SURFACE OR NOT--

"THE EXPOSURE MADE ME DELIRIOUS FOR DAYS--YEARS FOR ALL I KNOW--BUT MY NEXT MEMORY WAS WAKING UP ON MY COUCH...

"... AND I HAVEN'T BEEN SICK A DAY SINCE! THAT WAS CENTURIES AGO--I'M IMMORTAL AS FAR AS I CAN TELL!

"I'VE BEEN READING EVER SINCE--GOT A WHOLE NATIONAL LIBRARY TO CHOOSE FROM!"

SO--YOU'VE MASTERED THE ACCUMULATED WISDOM OF A DEAD WORLD! IS THIS RELEVANT?

IT CERTAINLY IS! I'VE READ ABOUT CABBAGES AND KINGS, GLACIER-SKIING AND INTERPLANETARY GRAMMAR...

...AND *ZYLONS!* LOTS ABOUT ZYLONS!

I'VE FOUGHT ZYLONS IN SPACE ALL MY LIFE! WHAT DOES A GUY WHO'S BEEN IN A HOLE FOR CENTURIES KNOW ABOUT ZYLONS?

I KNOW THEY CAN REGENERATE... MACK!

IF YOU BLASTED THAT BRUISER INTO A MILLION PIECES

--THEN THEY'LL GROW INTO A MILLION ZYLONS! OH MY GOD!

WELL, NOT QUITE A MILLION!

EVIDENTLY THEY NEED A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF UN-DAMAGED TISSUE BEFORE THEY CAN REBUILD THE WHOLE BODY...

... AND IT WAS THAT CRITICAL AMOUNT OF TISSUE I WAS LOOKING FOR WHEN I CAME TO THE SURFACE AFTER THE LAST BATTLE ON THE SURFACE ENDED!

UNFORTUNATELY, THE TISSUE CELLS GREW INTO A COMPLETE ZYLON IN TIME TO FIND *US* FIRST!

YOU SEE, THE ZYLONS ARE NOT INDIVIDUALS AT ALL, BUT PART OF A SINGLE MASSIVE INTELLIGENCE!

WHATEVER ONE ZYLON KNOWS, THEY ULTIMATELY ALL KNOW, SO--

WHAT IDIOCY IS THIS CRACKPOT SPOUTING NOW?

SHUT YOUR TRAP, JED!

THAT'S ALL RIGHT DEAR LADY.. PEOPLE HAVE LABELLED THE UNATTRACTIVE TRUTH IDIOCY BEFORE!

NOW, UNTIL A TROOP OF ZYLONS COMES TO PICK UP THOSE GROWING FROM THE CELLS OF THE ONE YOU VAPORIZED...

. I'M GOING TO HIDE SHAMELESSLY-- WHICH I ADVISE YOU TO DO AS WELL!

HE IS ABOUT HALFWAY TO HIS PERSONAL LITTLE SANCTUARY WHEN HE HEARS THE NOISE FROM ABOVE...

KERASH! CRACKK!

THEY DIDN'T LEAVE AND THE ZYLONS FOUND THEM, THE CRAZY KIDS!

IF I HAD ANY SENSE I'D KEEP WALKING...

...BUT I DON'T!

ON THE SURFACE, THE NOISE IS APPRECIABLY LOUDER --
--AS IT EMANATES FROM THE SHAKING, SHAKING, SHAKING STAR RAIDERS CRUISER ...
...UNTIL, FROM OVER, UNDER AND AROUND THE CRUISER --
THE ZYLONS --!
HEY, I'VE GOT EYES. I'M A NAVIGATOR, REMEMBER ?
YOU'LL NEED MORE THAN JUST EYES TO NAIL THESE CR--
--WHA?
TOMMY -- WHERE IN THE COSMOS HAS YOUR BRAIN GONE ?
AT LEAST I KNOW ENOUGH, JEDEDIAH...
...NOT TO BURN MY HAND TWICE ON THE SAME STOVE!
YOUR FORCE BEAM WON'T STOP THEM FOR MORE THAN A FEW SECONDS!
YES -- I'VE GOT SOME BETTER USE!
I'M SURE WE CAN PUT THOSE SECONDS TO BETTER USE...
...THAN BLASTING FOUR ZYLONS INTO FORTY!

THAT'LL HOLD THEM FOR A BIT LONGER!

WATCH WHERE YOU SHOOT THAT THING, OKAY?!

YOU AGAIN?!!

ZEKE! YOU CAME BACK!

I SHOULD'VE KNOWN! WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?

RIGGING TOGETHER A GADGET THAT MIGHT SAVE ALL OUR NECKS!

YEAH, RIGHT... WELL, WE'VE GOT A JOB TO DO, OLD MAN!

WHA--

JED -- IT GOT MY FORCE-FIELD PISTOL!

CAN'T YOU HOLD ONTO THAT DAMN THING!?

STAND BACK, I'M ON MY WA--

--HEY!! THIS ONE'S GOT MY LEG!

IT'S OKAY... I'LL CUSHION YOUR FALL!

WELL, THOSE TWO LOOK EMINENTLY CAPABLE INDEED OF KEEPING THE UGLIES BUSY FOR A TIME...

...BUT THEY'LL THANK US FOR THIS BEFORE THEY TIRE--

--AS I THANK YOU INDEED, MY FRIEND, OH YES!

I KNEW YOU WOULD FIND ALL WE NEEDED IN THE OLD *STAR RAIDERS* CRUISER TO BUILD THESE!

NOW IF ONLY I KNEW--

--WHETHER THE BLESSED THINGS WORK!

I THINK WE'VE HIT A STALEMATE! HOW IS IT ON YOUR END?

WE HAVEN'T GOT A CHANCE--UNLESS THESE CHARACTERS LOSE THEIR WIND!

TOMMY!--TRY OUT A BARREL OF THIS ON IT!

URRGFPHH--!

WHAT IN ALL ENTROPY IS THAT?

AS ZEKE TOSSES HIS CONTRAPTION FROM HIDING, A ZYLON SEIZES THE ADVANTAGE OVER TOMMY'S COMRADE AND

TOMMY--HELP ME--I--UHH--

HANG ON, MON CAPITAINE!

THUK!

THE POINT OF THE ROCKET PENETRATES THE ZYLON'S HIDE AND THE GROUP STANDS AGHAST, NOT KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT NEXT...
...WHEN IT FIRES UP!
IT WORKS! WHAT ARE YOU DOING STANDING THERE WITH YOUR FACES HANGING OUT?...

...GET TO WORK, CAPTAIN!

IT'LL CARRY HIM INTO SPACE WHERE EVEN ZYLON LIFE CAN'T SURVIVE!
THE OLD MAN KNOWS HIS STUFF...

...LET'S FINISH THE JOB!
BATTLE STATIONS, NAVIGATOR!

AYE, AYE, CAPTAIN!

"THE OLD MAN'S SMARTER THAN HE LOOKS," JED MUMBLES...
"IT'S THE BEST IDEA I'VE SEEN ALL WEEK," TOMMY THINKS...
...AND AS THE ROCKET-POWERED PROJECTILES MAKE CONTACT WITH THE TOUGH ZYLON EXOSKELETONS...
... HUMANS SEE FOR THE FIRST TIME WHAT FEAR LOOKS LIKE ON THE FACES OF THESE CREATURES--
--THESE MONSTERS WHOSE NUMBERS HAVE RAINED DESTRUCTION AND ENSLAVEMENT UPON THE GALAXY FOR A THOUSAND YEARS!
LIKE THREE COMETS THEY RISE TOWARD SPACE AND.. DISAPPEAR--

AS THE DUST SETTLES YET AGAIN, THE ELATION FADES AND IT SEEMS THERE IS MORE WORK TO BE DONE...

THE HUKKAS ARE VERY BRIGHT CREATURES, ACTUALLY!

THEY'VE TAKEN BETTER CARE OF THE *STAR RAIDER CRUISER* THAN I HAVE OF THE LIBRARY..

...TOO BAD NO ONE WILL EVER CONQUER THE ZYLONS WITH IT!

CONQUER THE ZYLONS WITH *THAT* OLD HEAP?

THAT "OLD HEAP," YOUNG MAN, MIGHT WELL BE THE MOST SOPHISTICATED STARSHIP IN THE GALAXY!

BUT THE CRUISER ALONE WON'T CHANGE THINGS -- NOT WITHOUT A PLAN!

AND I SUPPOSE YOU'VE GOT ONE OF *THOSE* STORED AWAY IN THAT FUZZY OLD BRAIN OF YOURS, RIGHT? OKAY--

--START TALKING!

WELL, IT'S ALL THEORETICAL, YES, INDEED...

WE WOULD NEED SOMEONE TO SPREAD THE WORD AMONG THE YOUNG SURVIVORS OF CONQUERED PLANETS--

- RECRUITING THEM TO BE TRAINED INTO A STRIKE FORCE... A NEW *STAR RAIDERS* FORCE!

WE'D NEED A HOME BASE. THIS WORLD WOULD BE AS GOOD AS ANY...

...AND SOMEONE WOULD HAVE TO REPAIR THE CRUISER HERE TO BE THE FLAGSHIP OF THIS NEW FORCE--

- THEORETICALLY, OF COURSE!

NO THEORIES ABOUT IT! WE NEED YOUR EXPERTISE, ZEKE, AND WE'RE GOING TO DO IT FOR REAL!

JED AND I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR A CHANCE LIKE THIS SINCE WE MET!

I'LL DO THE RECRUITING--

JED WILL DO THE REPAIRING -- I SHALL RETURN!

RETURN? WHEN? FROM WHERE--

YOU CAN'T JUST TAKE MY SHIP AND--

BE OF GOOD COURAGE, MON *CAPITAINE!*

SHE DID IT! SHE REALLY DID IT, CAPTAIN JEDEDIAH POOLE REALIZES AS HIS "SNOWBIRD" FLIES DEEPER AND DEEPER INTO THE SKY...

THAT LITTLE... WITCH!

NOW I'LL HAVE TO REPAIR THAT STAR RAIDER THING -- OR WHATEVER IT IS --

-- OR ELSE ALL I'VE GOT TO HANG OUT WITH IS HUKKAS AND...

...URGH!

YOU *DO* KNOW WHAT NEEDS TO BE FIXED ON THAT CRUISER DOWN THERE, RIGHT?

OF COURSE I DO... AND I'LL TELL *YOU*, TOO!

LET'S DO IT, AND I DON'T WANT ANY OF YOUR LIP, VICKER!

I HAVEN'T TALKED FACE TO FACE WITH ANOTHER LIVING HUMAN FOR... oh, IT'S GOT TO BE MORE THAN A HUNDRED YEARS!

AND YOU KNOW, CAPTAIN, YOU'VE GOT TO BE THE MEANEST SON OF A SHE-DOG I'VE MET IN ALL MY BORN CENTURIES!

JEDEDIAH, THIS COULD BE THE START OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP!

THAT'S PRETTY GOOD... YOU MAKE THAT UP YOURSELF?

I THINK I READ IT SOMEWHERE, ACTUALLY-

EVEN AS HOPES RISE FOR THE FUTURE OF THIS UNLIKELY TRIO, FAR ACROSS THE LONG COLD GALAXY...

... A MASSIVE AND POWERFUL CONSCIOUSNESS ARISES -- AS IF FROM AN UNWANTED, DISCOMFITING DREAM-

-- AND RISING, THIS CONSCIOUSNESS SEEKS...

... EXERCISE...

THE ONE CALLED THE ***DARK DESTROYER*** WHO KIDNAPPED YOU IS GONE, MY CHILDREN...

... AND I AM HERE FOR YOU AGAIN!

BE HERE FOR ME AGAIN, MY CHILDREN--

--COME HOME TO MOTHER...

... AND I WILL BE YOUR QUEEN ONCE MORE--!

WELL, YOU HAVEN'T EXACTLY BEEN BUSY SITTING IN THIS HOLE THE PAST FEW CENTURIES!
...MORE THAN SIX HUNDRED YEARS AGO--
--AND I REMEMBER IT AS THOUGH IT WERE YESTERDAY!
LISTEN...THIS HISTORICAL TAPE HAD SOME AUDIO!
YOU'LL HEAR IT BETTER IF I SWITCH TO INTERIOR MONITOR!
ZEROING IN ON ZYLON BASESTAR--
--ITS SHIELDS APPEAR TO BE FLUTTERING...
NOW!

WELL, HOW DO YOU LIKE MY "SCRAP HEAP" NOW, CAPTAIN--?
SWITCH THE MONITOR TO EXTERNAL AGAIN FOR A SECOND, WOULD YOU, ZEKE...
...SO I CAN WATCH THIS BABY MOVE!
GRADUALLY THE HARD-NOSED FLIER JEDEDIAH POOLE BECOMES ENTHRALLED BY THE FLUID MOTION OF THE ANCIENT CRUISER THROUGH THE SPACEWAYS --
--FASCINATED BY THE UNASSAILABLE SKILL OF A PILOT IN A RECORDING MADE IN A DISTANT CENTURY--
--POSITIVELY ENCHANTED BY THE FRESHNESS, THE GRACE, THE THRILL OF PASSING AMONG THE VERY JAWS OF AN ANCIENT ENEMY TO EMERGE NOT ONLY UNSCATHED, BUT VICTORIOUS!

JED'S DETACHED SCOWL SLOWLY MELTS LIKE THE FACE OF A SNOWMAN AS OLD EZEKIEL VICKER'S TAPE RUNS ITS SPECTACULAR COURSE...

...AND FOR THE FIRST TIME THE GRITTY STAR PILOT REALIZES THAT SOMEWHERE IN THE BURIED TECHNOLOGY OF MERE MORTALS--IN THE COLLECTIVE MIND OF HUMANITY--LIE THE POWER AND THE HONOR TO WREST A GALAXY FROM THE HANDS OF THE ZYLON DEVILS...

LOOK! THE PILOT TOOK OUT THE *MOTHER* SHIP AND THE OTHER ONE'S *FALTERING!*

HE'S NOT LETTING UP FOR A *MOMENT*, THAT PILOT--GOING AFTER THE ZYLON THAT'S *DIS-ORIENTED*...

...YES, I KNOW--LIKE AN ORPHANED *BEE* LOOKING FOR ITS *HIVE!*

I *SAW* THIS SHOW WITH ITS ORIGINAL *CAST!*

"THAT PILOT'S *INCREDIBLE!* WHO IS THAT GUY--?"

"HE WAS JUST... SOMEONE WHO LIVED HERE--BEFORE THE *HOLOCAUST!*"

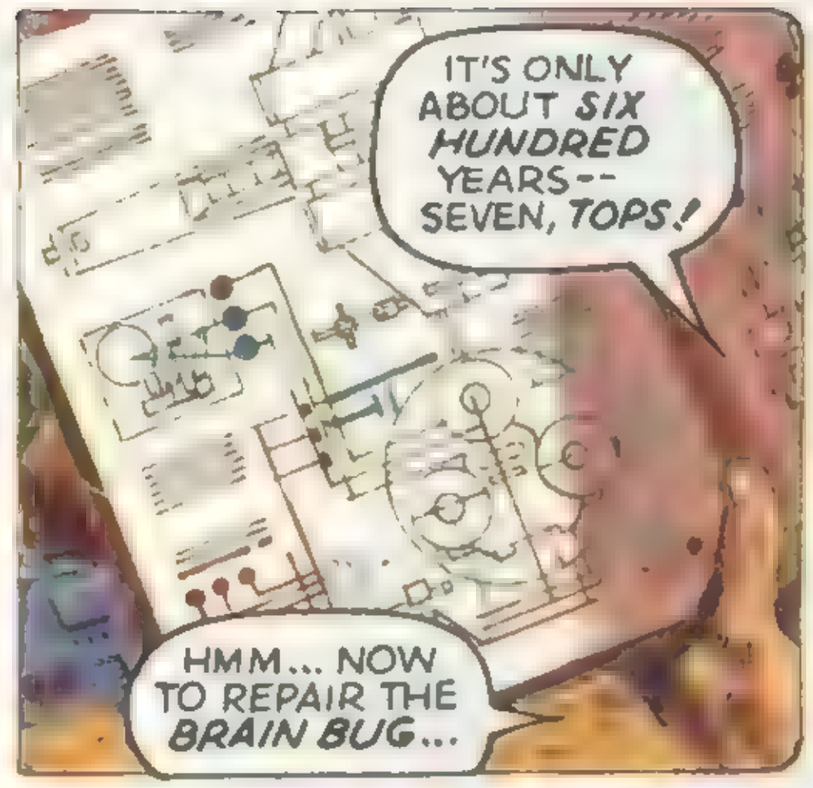
BUT HALFWAY ACROSS THE GALAXY, ON THE DARK WORLD OF THE ZYLONS' ORIGIN...
IT WAS ONE OF THOSE THREE INSURGENTS--THE FEMALE ONE, IF MY INSTINCTS SERVE ME WELL...
...AND MY INSTINCTS ALWAYS SERVE ME WELL!
THERE WILL BE NO MORE NONSENSE REGARDING THESE THREE! THEY MUST BE DESTROYED--
--BEFORE THEY POSE A REAL THREAT!
THEIR TYPE CANNOT BE TOLERATED IN THIS GALAXY--
--FOR THEY SEEK COMPUTERS... RECORDS... INFORMATION--!
INFORMATION IS POWER, AND IN MY GALAXY, EVEN THE SMALLEST SHRED OF POWER MUST RESIDE WITH ME--
--THE QUEEN MOTHER OF THE ZYLONS!
IS THAT CLEAR, MY CHILDREN?
AND LIGHT YEARS AWAY...

...A ONCE STATIONARY SQUAD OF ZYLON FIGHTERS BEGINS A SLOW DESCENT TO THE PLANET ORIC, A HUB OF COMMUNICATION, AND COMMERCE IN A BESIEGED GALAXY...
...WHERE HALF A MILLION MORTALS OF NEARLY AS MANY RACES PURSUE A SEMBLANCE OF A LIVELIHOOD ON THE MARKETPLACE PLANET...
...SOME PRAISE THEIR GURUS OR PROMOTE THEMSELVES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE...
...SOME HONE A SKILL, LIKE CHARMING THE VICIOUS SNAPPING EGGS OF PERCOM...
...BUT ONLY ONE HAS CHOSEN THIS PLACE, IN THIS AGE WITHOUT DIGNITY OR INTEGRITY, TO EXHORT HER FELLOW MORTALS TO DEFEND THEIR HONOR...
...AND THERE ARE THOSE WHO LISTEN...
IT'S FEAR I'M TALKING ABOUT...
OUR FEAR OF THE ZYLONS IS A STATE OF MIND, AND WE CAN OVERCOME IT--
...NAMELESS, UNREASONING, UNJUSTIFIED TERROR WHICH PARALYZES NEEDED EFFORTS TO CONVERT RETREAT INTO ADVANCE!

-- BUT WE'LL HAVE TO PUT OUR BODIES AND OUR HONOR ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK TO DO IT!
WE'RE A SMALL GROUP OF FREEDOM FIGHTERS BUT WE DON'T PLAN TO STAY SMALL FOR LONG!
YOU THERE... WHO ARE YOU?
M-ME...? I'M CALLED SKRIMSH... ER-- WHAT'S UP THERE?
BREAKING TOMMY'S RHYTHM AS IF IT WERE PLANNED THAT WAY, A SCREAMING COMES ACROSS THE SKY...
...FROM THE EDGE OF A NIGHTMARE THERE APPEARS A ZYLON CRUISER...
YOUR ATTENTION! ATTENTION ALL CREATURES OF ORIC!
... AND WHATEVER THEIR STATION OR THEIR PECULIAR STORY, THEY PAY ATTENTION--
THE ZYLON IMPERIAL ORDER IS SEEKING ONE OF A NUMBER OF CRIMINAL INSURGENTS BELIEVED TO BE ON THIS PLANET--
--A HUMANOID FEMALE WITH THESE FACIAL FEATURES!
IF YOU SEE OR HAVE CONTACT WITH THIS HUMANOID, NOTIFY YOUR NEAREST ELECTED OFFICIAL IMMEDIATELY--
--AND YOU WILL BE PERMITTED TO ENJOY THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF YOUR PLANET!
METHINKS I SHOULD EXIT THIS WANTON WORLD AS GRACEFULLY AS I CAN MANAGE IT!
NOW HERE'S SOMETHING TO PUT ME IN A FINE POSITION WITH THE ZYLON OVERLORDS!
I'LL DO IT!

MEANWHILE...
MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL AND HAND ME THAT SOLDERING TORCH, ZEKE!
ZEEK!

GREAT! I GET ORANGE MONKEYS AS REPAIR ASSISTANTS--
MUN-KEEZ!
--AND A THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD MAN SPOUTING COSMIC MUMBO-JUMBO HE PASSES OFF AS WISDOM!


IT'S ONLY ABOUT SIX HUNDRED YEARS-- SEVEN, TOPS!
HMM... NOW TO REPAIR THE BRAIN BUG...

BRAIN BUG?!
ARE YOU TELLING ME HOW TO FIX THIS TUB--
--OR SLIPPING INTO SENILITY EVEN AS WE SPEAK?

SENILITY HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT, JEDEDIAH--
--BUT WITH THE BRAIN BUG'S HELP YOU MAY LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO GET THAT WAY!

YOU SEE, THE BRAIN BUG WAS DESIGNED TO ENSURE THE STAR RAIDER PILOT'S SURVIVAL--
--BY ALLOWING HIM TO PASS INFORMATION, INSTANTLY AND DIRECTLY, INTO THE MINDS OF HIS COMRADES!
WHAT WAS SO BAD ABOUT USING A RADIO?

WELL, FOR ONE THING, THE ZYLONS HAD THE UNCANNY ABILITY TO TOTALLY JAM DIRECT RADIO FREQUENCIES AT WILL!
HMM... THAT COULD MAKE THINGS MESSY--
--WELL, WHAT'RE YOU WAITING FOR, OLD MAN?
TELL ME ABOUT BRAIN BUGS!!

SO DOES THE OLD SCHOLAR ONCE AGAIN CONVINCE THE YOUNG FIREBRAND THAT HE DOES NOT KNOW EVERYTHING AS...

REMOVE THE *BRAIN BUG* CONTROL UNIT FROM THE PILOT'S CONSOLE CAVITY--

NOW I KNOW HOW YOU'VE *LIVED* SO LONG!...

YOU GET SOME YOUNG *PATSY* TO DO YOUR HEAVY *LABOR!*

HERE IT IS! NOW WHAT?

HANDLE IT GENTLY! IT'S *VERY* DELICATE!

TIGHTEN THE *SYNAPSE PEGS* MARKED IN BLUE!

I'M WAY AHEAD OF YOU, OLD MAN!

THIS HAS THE SAME KIND OF CIRCUITRY AS A *UNIVERSAL TRANSLATOR*--

--I COULD PUT THIS BACK TOGETHER WITH MY EYES CLOSED!

I WOULDN'T TRY THAT!--IF YOU AREN'T CAREFUL TO CLOSE DOWN THE CEREBELLUM CIRCUIT FIRST, IT MIGHT--

oh dear!

AIIEEEEEE!

FIRE, TOMMY!

EITHER THIS BOY IS DELIRIOUS...

...OR THE BRAIN BUG ACCIDENT HAS ESTABLISHED A MENTAL CHANNEL TO TOMMY!

FIRE!

WHAT'S THAT CLANGING IN MY HEAD?

TELLING ME TO...

...TO FIRE MY BLASTER--

SHE KNOWS HE WILL IGNORE CAUTION--AND PRECAUTION--TO HELP HER: HE'S DONE SO BEFORE!

HE KNOWS THAT HE HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO SAVE HER--HE HAS A REPUTATION TO MAINTAIN!

THE PLANET IS GIRDLED BY THE SLAVE/CHILDREN OF THE ZYLON QUEEN MOTHER...
...AND FOR THE WOMAN, THE BATTLE CONSISTS OF JUST ONE SUDDEN BLOW--
--SHE KEEPS HER WITS ABOUT HER...
...LOWERS CABIN PRESSURE GRADUALLY...
...ORDERS THE CRAFT INTO AERODYNAMIC MODE...
...BUTTRESSES SHIELDING OVER THE VOLATILE FUEL MIX...
...SHE LIVES THROUGH THE GLIDER-STYLE LANDING AND REMAINS CONSCIOUS...
...WHICH MEANS SHE WILL HAVE TO DEAL WITH WHAT IS TO COME NEXT--
SHE'S OUT THERE SOMEWHERE!
WHATEVER ZAP I GOT FROM THAT BRAIN BUG MACHINE IS FADING, BUT I KNOW SHE'S OUT THERE SOMEWHERE...
...AND WITH THIS BABY'S GALACTIC CHART AND SECTOR SCAN I CAN FIND HER!
JUST MOVE THE INDICATOR TO THE SECTOR WHERE ZYLONS ARE MASSING ON A NEUTRAL OUTPOST--
--AND HYPERDRIVE!
WARP ENERGY: 1 9304
TARGETS: 4 80:PESCLE
STAR DATE: 08.14

TIME STOPS FLOWING, AND VAST EXPANSES OF SPACE FOLD AWAY AGAINST THE SUPERLUMINAL SPEED OF THE STAR RAIDERS CRUISER...

WHICH EMERGES FROM THE SPACE WARP IN A DOCKET JUST A FEW MILLION KILOMETERS FROM ORIC...

QUITE CLOSE ENOUGH TO ATTRACT COMPANY.

MEANWHILE, ON THE SURFACE OF THE ORANGE PLANET...

I THOUGHT *JED* WAS TALKING TO ME BEFORE! ...AM I *MAD*?

NO MATTER NOW!... IT'S TIME TO TAKE MY MEDICINE!

YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!... COME DOWN AND BE DISARMED *IMMEDIATELY!*

ONLY IF YOU STOP YELLING AT ME!

THE ONLY THING WORSE THAN A *ZYLON* IS A *LOUD ZYLON LACKEY!*

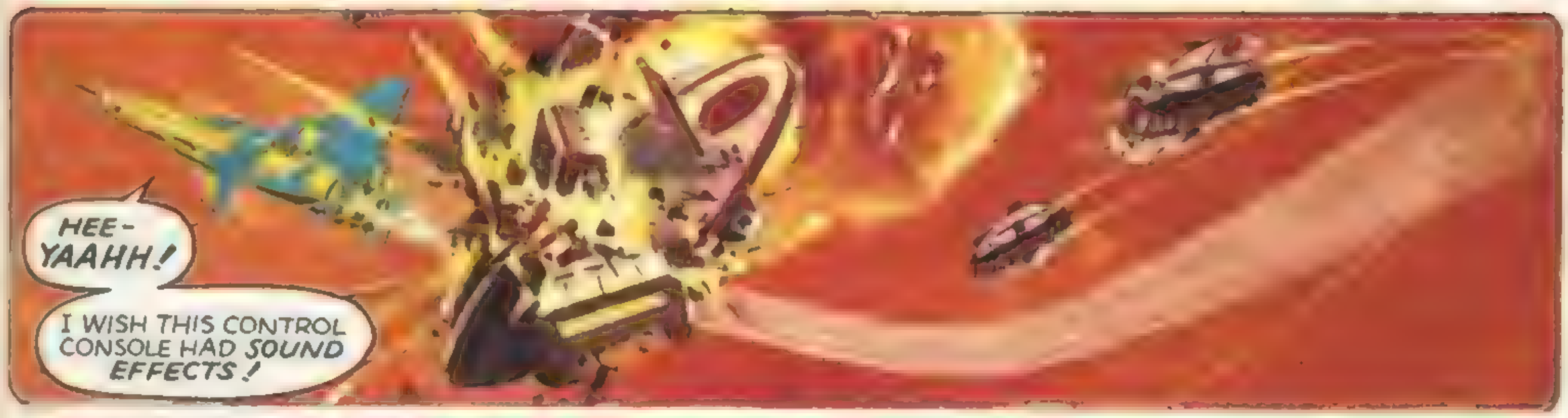
BUT NOTWITHSTANDING TOMMY'S TROUBLES ON THE EDGE OF ORIC'S ATMOSPHERE, JED IS HAVING THE TIME OF HIS LIFE!

THIS CRUISER'S TAKEN TWO DIRECT HITS WITH MINIMAL DAMAGE!

IMAGINE IF I HAD *EXPERIENCE* WITH HER!

BATTEN THE HATCHES, ZYLON *SCUM*...

...I'M GOING TO OPEN HER *UP!*



BUT LIFE DOWN BELOW IS NOT SO MERRY...

DISPERSE!--BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE ZYLON IMPERIAL ORDER!

THAT'S A FREEDOM FIGHTER YOU'RE ROUGHING UP, FRIEND...

...AND THAT MAKES YOU PART OF THE PROBLEM!

WISE-MOUTHED WHELP!...

WHAT HAPPENED? ONE MINUTE I'M IN BIG TROUBLE...
...THE NEXT, IT'S PARTY TIME ON ORIC!!
WHAT'S THAT?--UP IN THE SKY...!
MOTHER OF STARS! IT LOOKS LIKE ZEKE'S CRUISER...
...GIVING SOME ZYLON BLOODSUCKER A RUN FOR IT!
LAND-BOUND MORTALS HOLD THEIR BREATH--
--THOSE THAT HAVE BREATH TO TAKE--
--AS ONE OF THE RULING RACE CHASES AN UNFAMILIAR STAR CRUISER...
...DESPERATELY CLOSE TO A HIGH ROCK OUTCROPPING--UNTIL IT LOOKS CERTAIN THAT THE QUARRY HAS CHOSEN DEATH OVER DEFEAT--
--BUT THE CRUISER TWISTS AT AN IMPOSSIBLE ANGLE AND...
NOBODY FLIES LIKE THAT BUT MY PARTNER!
HEY, CAPTAIN! TAKE ME HOME!

BEAMING UP, KIDDO!

WHEW! YOU CERTAINLY DON'T BELIEVE IN EARLY ARRIVALS, DO YOU?

EARLY *ENOUGH, NAVIGATOR!* NOW LET'S TOW THE SNOWBIRD *HOME* BEFORE THOSE ORIC SCAVENGERS GET TO IT!

FOR A MOMENT, NO ONE MOVES ON THE PLANET BELOW, AND THERE ARE THOSE WHO STILL HAVE NOT TAKEN A BREATH...

IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR THE REMAINING ZYLON PATROLS TO TRACK THE PAIR, BUT THEY MUST ANSWER AN URGENT SUMMONS FROM HOME...

NOW, CHILDREN, WHY ARE WE HAVING SUCH TROUBLE WITH THIS PROBLEM...?

ARE THESE NOT SIMPLE *HUMANS* WITH WHOM WE ARE DEALING...? DO THEY NOT HAVE SINGLE *MINDS* AND DISORDERLY NATURES...?

WHAT WILL BE THE FURTHER PROBLEM, *COMMANDER*, WITH TRACKING DOWN, DIVIDING AND *DESTROYING* THEM?

THERE WILL BE NO FURTHER PROBLEM, MOTHER!

THAT'S A GOOD BOY...

...AND NOW, IF YOU DON'T MIND--
--I SHALL DISPOSE OF YOU RATHER UN-CEREMONIOUSLY, DEAR...
...SO THAT I MIGHT EFFICIENTLY DO THE SAME WITH YOUR BUNGLING BROTHERS IN ORBIT AROUND ORIC!

"YES, THAT WILL DO NICELY...."
OH, MY WHITE HOT SUNS! THE ZYLON SHIP SELF-DESTRUCTED--
--OR DID IT?
NO MATTER... I HAVE TO TRACK THAT FREEDOM FIGHTER'S HYPERSPACE COURSE--!

THE LIGHT YEARS PEEL OFF BEHIND THE NEW STAR RAIDERS LIKE THE SKINS OF AN ONION, AND SOON...
THUS DO THE PRODIGALS RETURN...!
STOW THE POETRY, ZEKE... TOMMY'S HURT!
I'M FINE... JUST A LITTLE SHAKEN!
AND WHAT OF THE PRODIGALS' FRIENDS?
FRIENDS?... WHA--
RECRUITS! I'LL BET THEY TRACKED US AS WE ENTERED HYPERDRIVE!
CADET SKRIMSH AND COMPANY REPORTING FOR TRAINING, SIRS!...
WELCOME! WELCOME! WELCOME!
WE WANT TO CLOBBER ZYLONS JUST LIKE YOU!
WELL, IT SEEMS WE'RE ON OUR WAY!

SO...
WHEN DO WE GO ON OUR FIRST MISSION?

YEAH, I KNOW... YOU GUYS WANT TO MEET ME AND MY FRIENDS FIRST, RIGHT...?
WELL, THAT WOULD BE GOOD FOR STARTERS--
ALL RIGHT. I'M *SKRIMSH* AND THESE FOUR ARE--
WHOA, YOUNGSTER-- WHY NOT LET THEM SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES!

THANK YOU, SIR. I AM *QABIRON*, ARCHER AND NATURALIST OF THE EPSILON-MINOTAURI SYSTEM!
I AM *RUSHERTOM*, POET AND SINGER! MY HOMEWORLD WAS CONQUERED AND MINED FOR PLUTONIUM BY THE ZYLONS!
THE ZYLONS SLAUGHTERED MY MASTER, A TRADER IN GEMSTONES! I AM *SULI KHOLIYYAM*, UNEMPLOYED BONDSERVANT!
MY NAME IS TOO COMPLICATED TO PRONOUNCE, BUT YOU CAN CALL ME *SMILEY*! I'M A MAGICIAN... HONEST!

SWELL BUNCH OF GUYS, EH?
WE WOULD BE FOOLS TO THINK OTHERWISE! OUR HOME IS YOURS!

AS FOR YOUR *MISSIONS*-- WELL, THERE ARE SOME PRELIMINARIES...
DAMN STRAIGHT THERE ARE... AND THEY BEGIN AT THE CRACK OF DAWN!

INDEED, FROM THAT DAWN AND THROUGH DOZENS OF DAWNS THEREAFTER, THE THREE LEADERS ATTEMPT TO TEACH THEIR RECRUITS ALL THEY KNOW...
MOVE WITH GRACE LIKE A MANTIS, QABIRON... NOT LIKE A FROG!
THIS IS A PHOTON PISTOL--AND IF ANY OF YOU TOUCHES IT BEFORE YOU KNOW WHAT IT CAN DO...
...I'LL CHEERFULLY TWIST IT AROUND YOUR THROAT!
... AND IF THEY DAMAGE OR DESTROY YOUR SHIELDS, PUNCH THE HYPERDRIVE BUTTON BEFORE YOU EVEN THINK--!
SEKKA-KAN! SEKKA-KAN!
SEKKA...? OH, I SEE--THAT'S THE SECTOR SCAN!

THEY WORK AND STUDY HARD BY DAY, THIS RAGTAG CORPS OF WILLFUL DREAMERS... AND BY NIGHT THEY EAT HEARTILY--

...THEN FOR A TIME WHILE MY PEOPLE WERE BEING SHIPPED TO THE SLAVE CAMPS, I HID IN THE WILDERNESS--

--UNTIL I COULD STOW AWAY ON A TRADE SHIP TO *ORIC* WHERE I FOUND TOMMY!

WE'VE NEVER HEARD *YOUR* LIFE STORY, *SKRIMSH*... HOW ABOUT IT?

YES, I DON'T THINK I'VE COME ACROSS YOUR RACE IN ALL MY TRAVELS! WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

OH, NOWHERE... REALLY!

I GREW UP IN THE ALLEYS OF ORIC'S MARKETPLACE!

I NEVER KNEW MY PARENTS-- JUST...

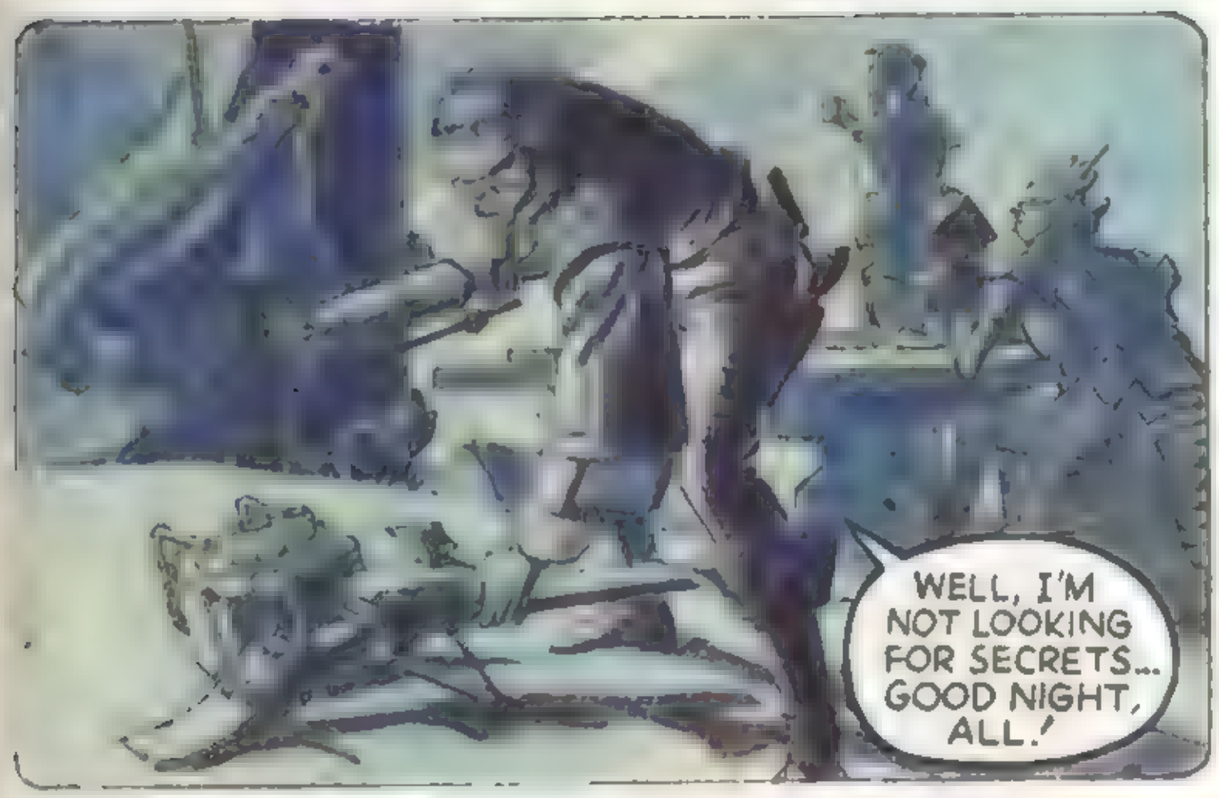
... JUST TRADERS AND *VAGABONDS*, LIKE ME!

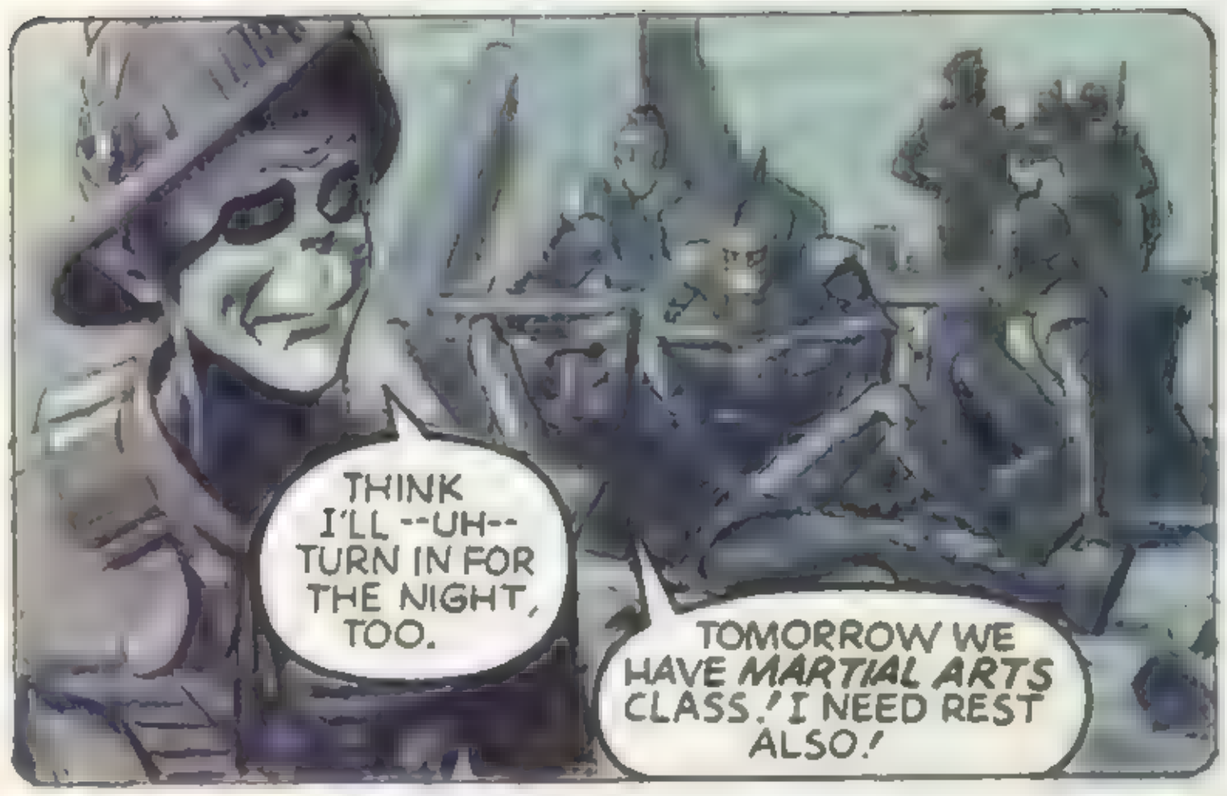
COME ON... YOU HAVE *NO IDEA* WHO YOU ARE?--THERE MUST BE A REASON YOU'RE *HERE*!

I'M HERE... TO GO ON *MISSIONS*... FOR THE *ADVENTURE*... THAT'S ALL--

--AND MAYBE...

... A LITTLE BIT MORE--


WELL, I'M NOT LOOKING FOR SECRETS... GOOD NIGHT, ALL!


THINK I'LL --UH-- TURN IN FOR THE NIGHT, TOO.
TOMORROW WE HAVE *MARTIAL ARTS* CLASS! I NEED REST ALSO!

QUIET...VERY QUIET--
THEY'D NEVER BELIEVE ME IF I TOLD THEM WHAT I FELT--

--BUT I'VE LEARNED TO TRUST MY INSTINCTS--AND THEY'VE NEVER BEEN STRONGER!

I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO SENSES THE DANGER--SO I'VE *GOT* TO DO THIS *MYSELF*!
WELL-- HERE GOES!

HEY! WHO'S FIRING UP TH--

DAMMIT!

WHY DO MY *FRIENDS* KEEP STEALING MY *HARDWARE*?

YAAHH--
HOOEY!

THAT LITTLE SON OF A MUTANT IS GONNA SCRAP THAT CRUISER!
NOW YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE WATCHING YOU FLY, JEDEDIAH...

...BESIDES, HE KNOWS HE'S AS HOT A PILOT AS THERE IS IN THE GALAXY NOW--
SINCE HE HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE OF HAVING YOU FOR A TEACHER!

WOW! IT'S JUST THE WAY JED TOLD ME...
THE WILDEST SHIP IN THE STARS!

I'VE GOT PLACES TO GO...!

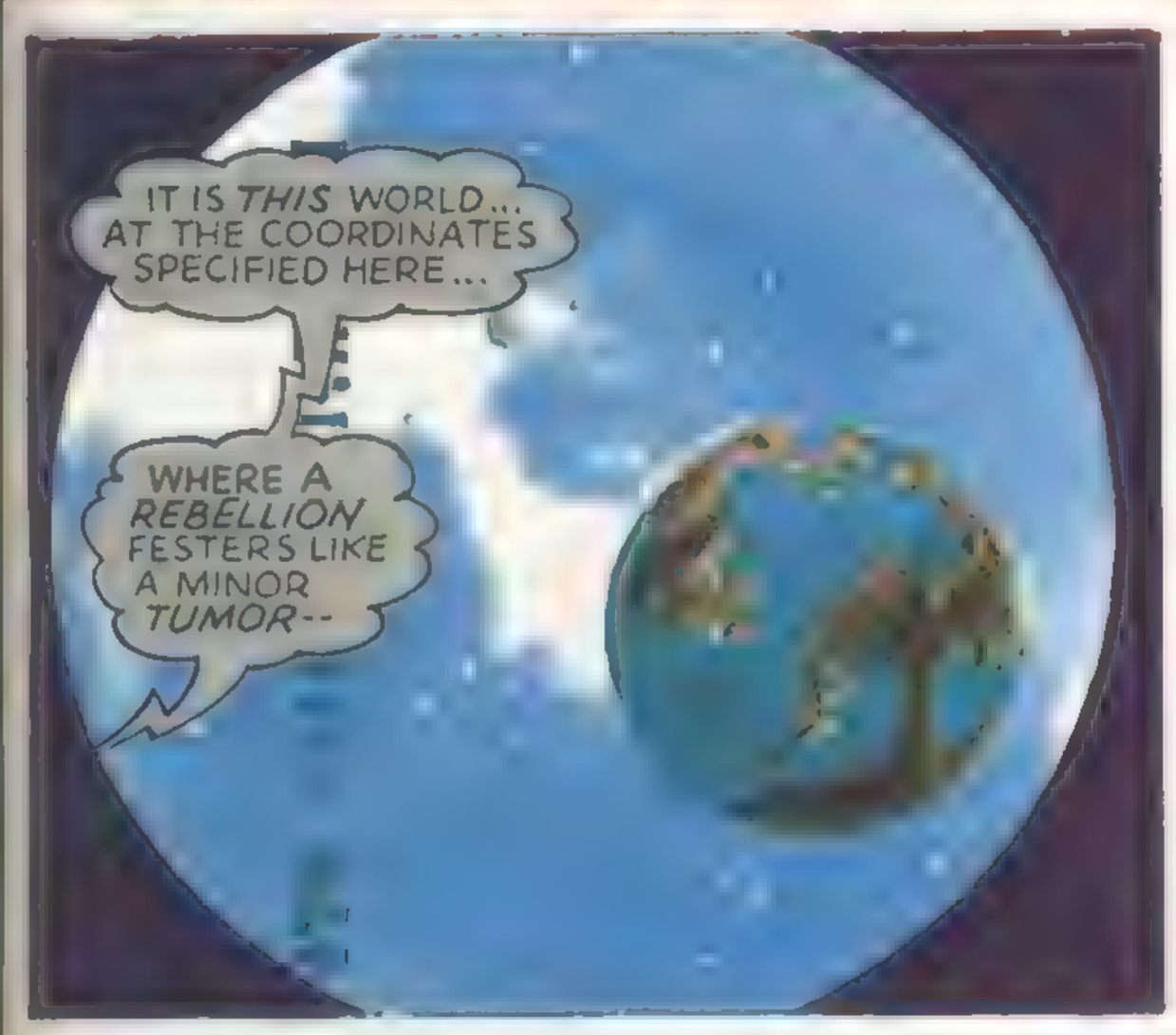
YOU'LL EXCUSE MY TAKING LIBERTIES, OH CAPTAIN, YOUR MAJESTY, SIR--
URGFPHH--!

--BUT I BROUGHT HIM HERE AND I'LL BRING HIM BACK!
YOU'RE GONNA REGRET IT, TOMMY!
I MAY ALREADY!

BUT, MOMENTS BEFORE SKRIMSH BEGINS HIS IMPULSIVE JOURNEY: ON THE ZYLONS' HIVE-WORLD HALF A UNIVERSE AWAY, THE MOST POWERFUL BEING IN THAT GALAXY MAKES HER PLANS...

IT HAS HAPPENED AS I FEARED IT MIGHT SOMEDAY, MY CHILDREN--

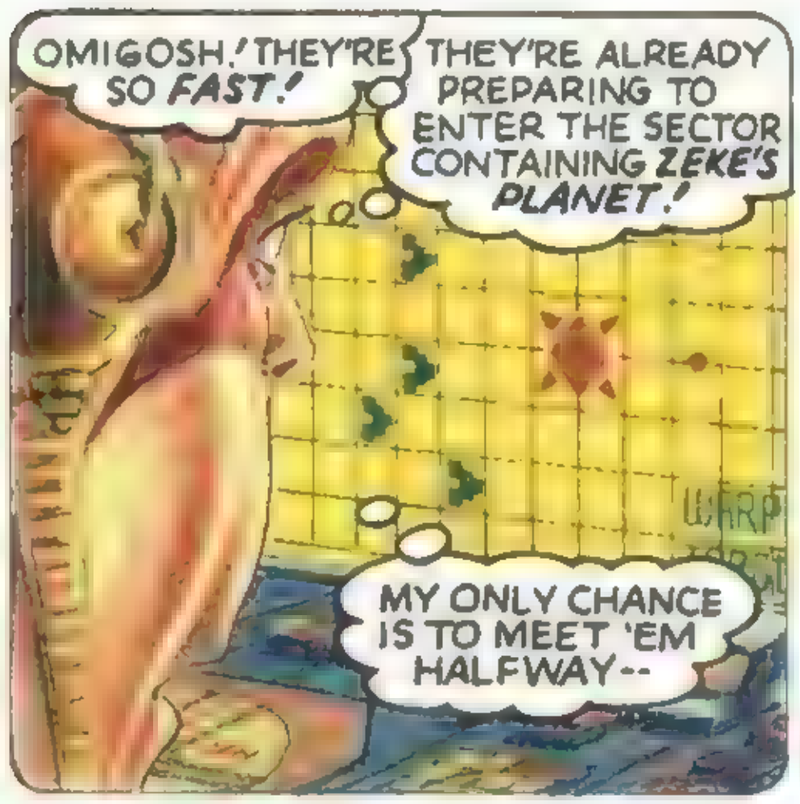
--SO IT IS NOW NECESSARY TO INITIATE THE PREEMPTIVE REMOVAL OF A PLANET!



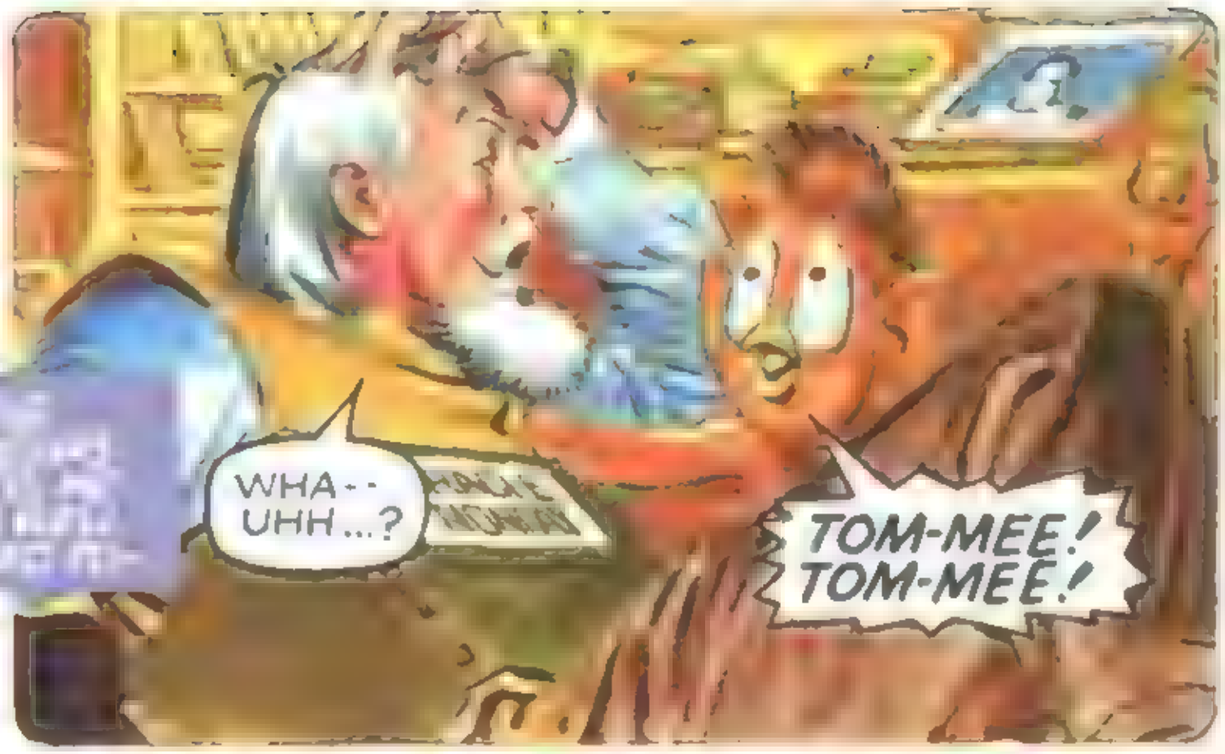
...."AND THEN COME BACK HOME TO *MOTHER*--!"

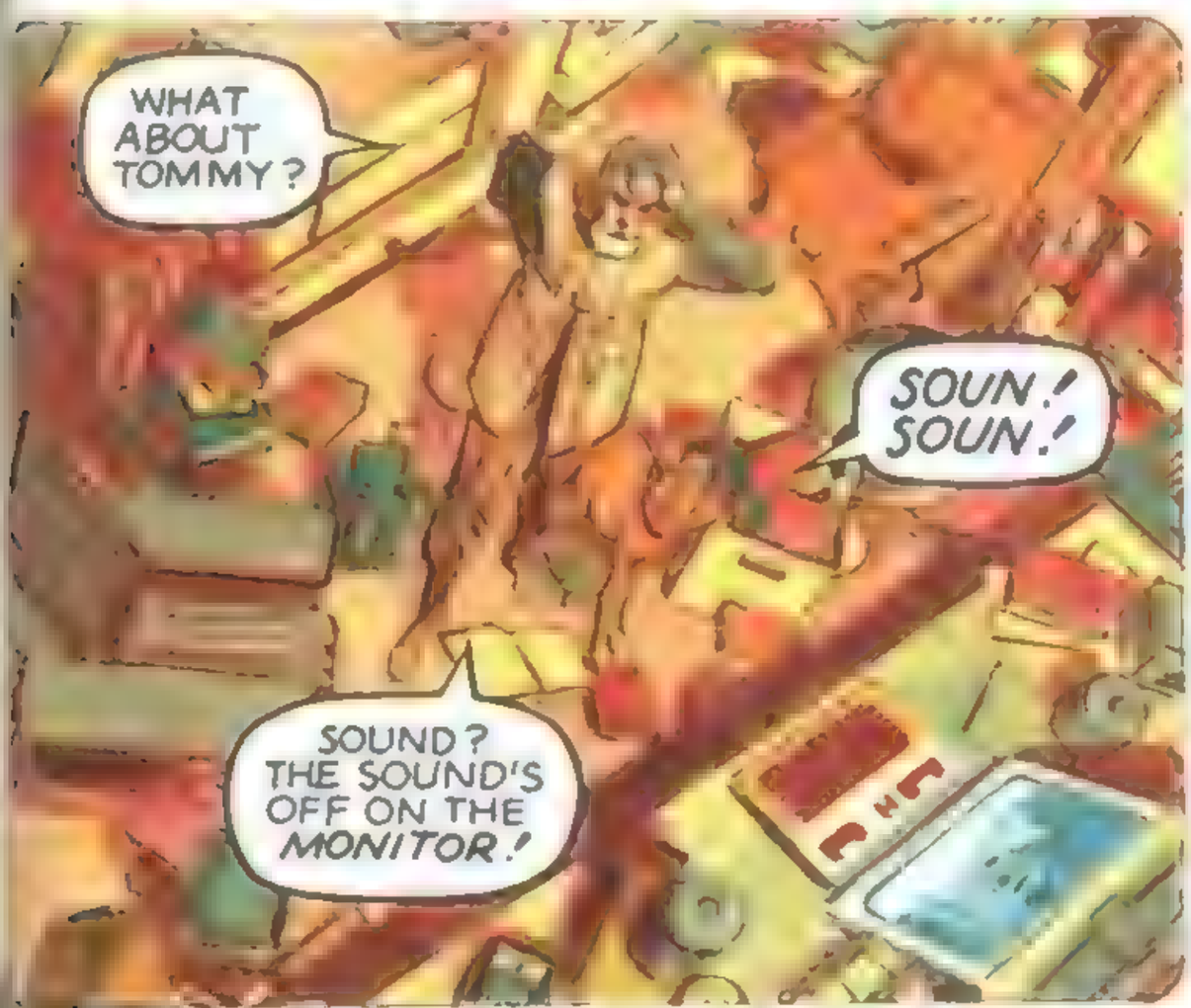
I *KNOW* WHAT THAT FIEND IS UP TO AND I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO *DOES*...

...AND I CAN'T LET *TOMMY* OR *JED* OR *ANYBODY* STOP ME!



ZEEK!


WHA-- UHH...?
TOM-MEE! TOM-MEE!


WHAT ABOUT TOMMY?
SOUN! SOUN!
SOUND? THE SOUND'S OFF ON THE MONITOR!

GOOD EVENING, DEAR! WHAT'S THE BAD NEWS...?
JED WILL EXPLAIN HOW THIS HAPPENED...BUT I'M CALLING FROM DEEP SPACE--

SKRIMSH HAS THE CRUISER AND I'M IN THE SNOWBIRD AND WE'RE BEING TRACKED BY I-DON'T-KNOW-HOW-MANY ZYLONS!
MY... LORD!

I'M SWITCHING ON THE GALACTIC CHART HERE! IT'S COMING IN... YES!
I'M WITH BOTH OF YOU, TOMMY! I CAN SEE THE SITUATION NOW--
--AND IT APPEARS TO BE VERGING ON THE DESPERATE!

...AND LIGHT SECONDS BEHIND, THE SNOWBIRD'S SUBSPACE COMMUNICATOR BARKS OUT ZEKE VICKER'S WARNING TO HIS LEVEL-HEADED COMPATRIOT--
"BEARING SIX DEGREES, TOMMY... THEY'RE RIGHT AHEAD NOW--"
BUT AHEAD, TUMBLING INTO A STORM OF ZYLON WARSHIPS WITH CENTURIES-OLD TECHNOLOGY IN HIS HANDS AND THE IMPETUOUS DETERMINATION OF YOUTH IN HIS SOUL--
THE URCHIN FROM THE ALLEYS OF THE WORLD OF ORIC DOES HIS BEST TO SHOW THE ZYLON MASTERS OF A GALAXY THE FURY OF AN UNWILLING SLAVE!

ZYLON FIGHTERS AT EIGHT O'CLOCK, TOMMY! THE FIRST ONE'S SPOTTED YOU!

THANKS, ZEKE...
...AND I'M COMMENCING EVASIVE MANEUVERS! MAYBE THEY'LL LEAD ME TO THEIR COMMAND CENTER!
DON'T RISK PLAYING WITH THEM, TOMMY!--

THERE'S ANOTHER ZYLON BIRD BEHIND YOU NOW!
GOT THE MESSAGE...

I'M ACTI-VATING MY PHOTON CANNON NOW--
TO THE GOOD FORTUNE OF BOTH OF US!
ZYLON FIGHTER NUMBER ONE IN MY SIGHTS...CLOSER... CLOSER...
...AND THE CANNON IS ARMED--

--FIRE!

IN THAT MOMENT, AND FOR THE BRIEF DURATION OF THE BATTLE --

THE SPACEFARING WOMAN BECOMES ONE WITH HER SHIP AND WEAPONRY... A SINGLE DEADLY, INTELLIGENT ORGANISM STANDING AGAINST THE PAIR OF ZYLON INSURGENTS...

THE FIRST TO WHOM NEVER EVEN MUST HIT IT!

AS FOR THE SECOND...

WANNA RACE, ZYLON PIG?

CATCH ME...

...IF YOU...

...CAN!

AND THE SNOW-BIRD SLICES THROUGH THE FOLDS OF SPACE INTO A MOMENT OF DECEPTIVE QUIET IN SEARCH OF THE VICIOUS BATTLE AHEAD...

HANG ON, SKRIMSH! HELP IS ON THE WAY!

MERE LIGHT-SECONDS AWAY THE ANCIENT STAR RAIDERS CRUISER FRANTICALLY WINDS, ROLLS, WEAVES AND BELCHES THE FURY OF ITS PHOTON TORPEDOES--

--ITS INEXPERIENCED PILOT OBLIVIOUS TO THE FACT THAT THE CAVALRY HAS JUST ARRIVED!

SKRIMSH! LET'S GET OUTTA HERE!

BUT THE YOUNG ALIEN DOES NOT HEED THE CALL--

AM I BE-COMING... A KILLER?...

...OR IS IT REALLY KILLING TO RID THE UNI-VERSE OF THESE OVER-SIZED INSECTS?

THE TRUTH IS...

IT DOESN'T MATTER--

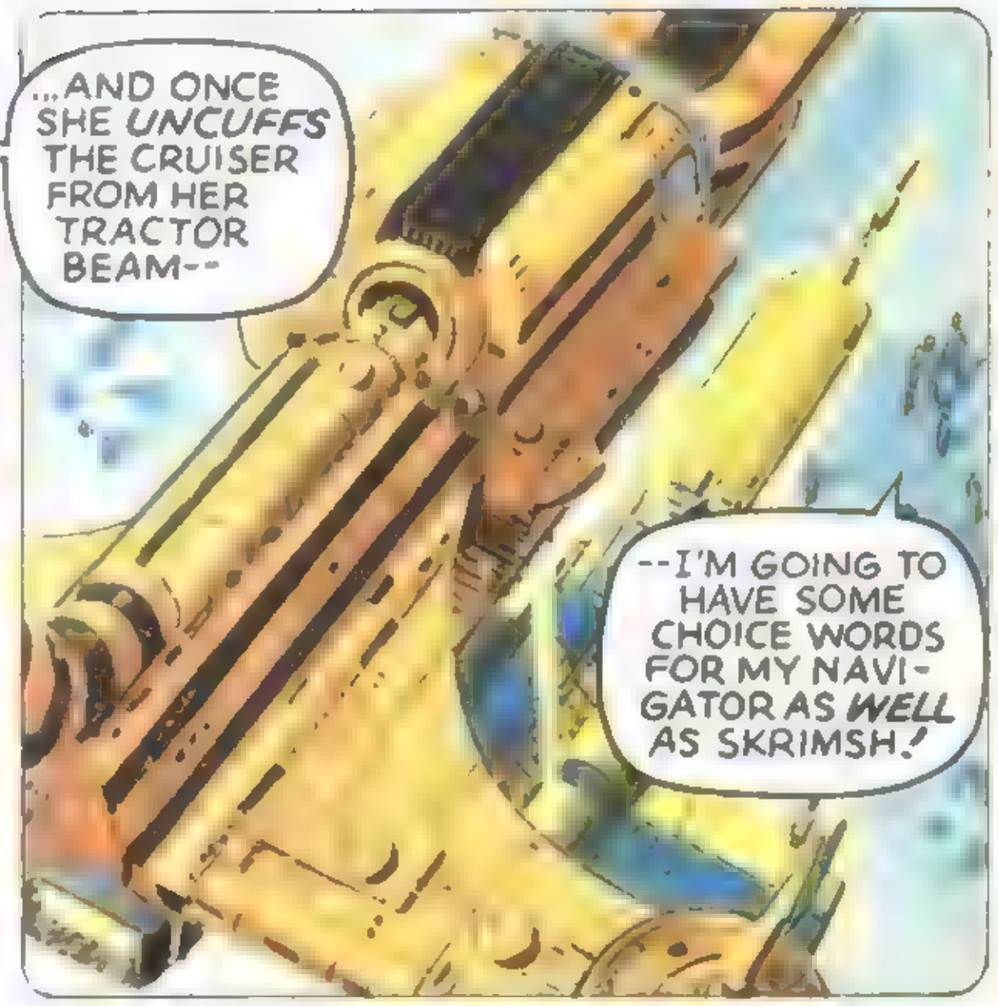
--AS LONG AS NO ONE CAN STOP ME FROM PLOW-ING THROUGH THESE MUR-DERERS ON MY WAY TO...

THE LITTLE GUY'S A MANIAC! HE'S IGNORING MY RADIO TRANSMIS-SION--TIME FOR ME TO TAKE SOME MORE--

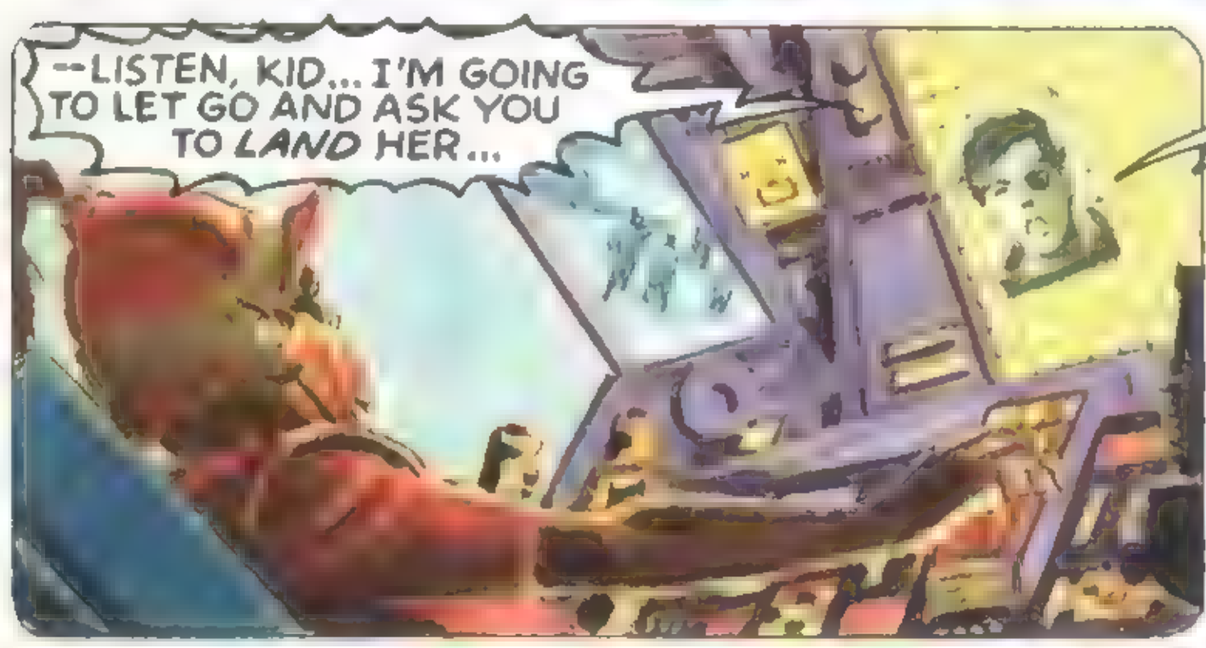
--DECISIVE ACTION!

SKILLFULLY, LIKE A FIBRE THROUGH A FABRIC, TOMMY WEAVES THROUGH THE PATTERN OF THE BATTLE AND CLAMPS A BEAM ONTO THE CRUISER...

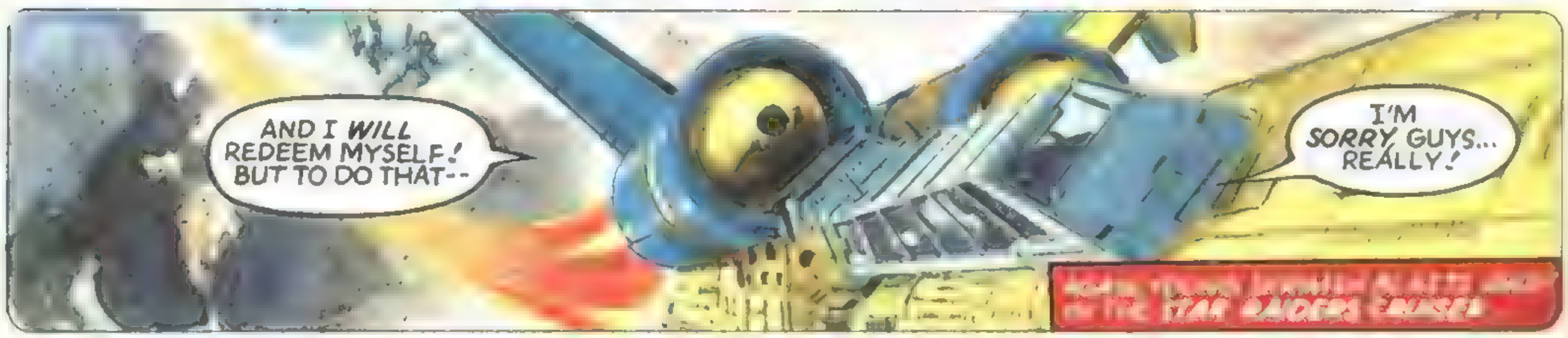
AHH... THE PRODIGALS RETURN!
ABOUT TIME...


...AND ONCE SHE UNCUFFS THE CRUISER FROM HER TRACTOR BEAM--
--I'M GOING TO HAVE SOME CHOICE WORDS FOR MY NAVIGATOR AS WELL AS SKRIMSH!

ENTHUSIASM'S ONE THING, BUT STUPIDITY'S ANOTHER!
DON'T BE TOO HARD ON EITHER OF THEM, JEDEDIAH...
...AFTER ALL, YOU PUT THE ENTHUSIASM THERE YOURSELF!


--LISTEN, KID... I'M GOING TO LET GO AND ASK YOU TO LAND HER...

...GIVE YOU A CHANCE TO REDEEM YOURSELF! DON'T BLOW IT!
OH... I WON'T BLOW IT!


AND I WILL REDEEM MYSELF! BUT TO DO THAT--
I'M SORRY GUYS... REALLY!

THIS TIME TOMMY LOSES NO TIME BEATING AFTER HIM, BUT NOW...

I'M NOT SITTING OUT THIS ONE!... SMILEY, IS YOUR CRAFT SPACE-WORTHY?

IT IS MANEUVERABLE ENOUGH, BUT--

GREAT! I'M BUYING IT!... HOPE MY CREDIT'S GOOD!

OH LORD... I HOPE I CAN GET UNDER-GROUND TO MY CONTROL CONSOLES--

--BEFORE THEY CAN WARP INTO A ZYLON SWARM LIGHT-YEARS AWAY!

AS ON THE HIVE-WORLD, ANOTHER MIND WATCHES...

THE SHIP APPROACHES US, MY CHILDREN -- FOLLOWED BY TWO OTHERS!

IT WILL BE UNNECESSARY TO DESTROY THE PLANET ONCE WE DISPOSE OF THE SHIP'S PILOT--

...ONE WHOSE PRESENCE I HAVE SENSED FOR THE GENERATION SINCE WE DEALT WITH THE GUAT-TIANS!

SURROUND AND ENGULF LIKE GOOD LITTLE BOYS...

LOOK AT THAT GALACTIC CHART... ALL OF A SUDDEN CRAWLING WITH ZYLON WARSHIPS!

NO MATTER!... WHAT MORE HAVE I GOT TO LOSE--?

BUT JUST WHAT WAS IT THAT THIS SECRETIVE YOUNG CADET HAD LOST? --WHAT PAIN TEARS AT HIS MEMORIES ?

WOW... THEY SAY THE BLIND ONE IS SOMEHOW LINKED *MENTALLY* WITH THE EGGS! I WONDER HOW HE *DOES* THAT!

I WONDER...

...IF WITH ALL THOSE *TOKENS* IN HIS COLLECTION PLATE--

...IT'D BE SUCH A TERRIBLE THING TO GIVE HIM A *ROCK* TO PUT OFF HIS CONCENTRATION--

--LONG ENOUGH TO GATHER UP SOME *DINNER*!

LUCID! I... BOUGHT SOME EGGS!

MIRACLE OF MIRACLES...!

ETTO HAD SOME EXTRAS TODAY, AND--

YOU GOT THE *CHARMER* TO PART WITH SOME PRECIOUS *EGGS*? HARDLY!...

YOU'RE A GOOD BOY, *SKRIMSH*, AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT AN OLD CRIPPLED *VAGRANT* CAN DO TO THANK YOU!--

HOW ABOUT A *STORY*?

THERE *IS* A STORY THAT I HAVE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU, BOY--OF THE LOST WORLD OF *GUAT*...

...HOME OF A HAPPY, MUSICAL PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL POWERS OF *EMPATHY*--THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND EMOTIONS INTUITIVELY--

--A RACE, I BELIEVE, OF WHICH *YOU* ARE A MEMBER--MAYBE THE LAST *SURVIVOR!*

"THE *GUATTIAN* PEOPLE HAD LEARNED TO LIVE. THEY HAD THOUGHT, WITH THE *OVERLORDSHIP* OF THE ZYLONS--BUT FOR REASONS KNOWN ONLY TO THE OVERLORDS, THESE GENTLE PEOPLE HAD BECOME A *THREAT*...

"ON THAT DAY THE ZYLON SHIPS APPEARED IN THE SKY--AND SOON A SILENT SCREAM OF ANTICIPATED PAIN STREAMED ACROSS THE SURFACE OF THE DOOMED WORLD...

"FOR WHEN SUCH A PSYCHICALLY-POWERFUL RACE ANTICIPATED THEIR IMPENDING END, A RIPPLE OF *MENTAL ENERGY* TORE THROUGH SURROUNDING SPACE LIKE A GREAT *ETHER WIND* INSINUATING ITSELF INTO THE ZYLONS' MINDS, SO THAT RATHER THAN *BLASTING* THE PLANET APART

"THE ENCIRCLING ZYLON SWARM WERE ALL FORCED TO CRASH TO EITHER TO ITS SURFACE, DESTROYING THEMSELVES AS WELL...

"THE PEOPLE OF GUAT WERE SPARED *WONDERED* BY THE ZYLONS--BUT THEY TOOK MANY OF THEIR DEFENDERS ALONG WITH THEM AS THEY DIED!"

OLD LUCID'S STORY STRUCK A CHORD IN YOUNG SKRIMSH'S SOUL, AND IT BECAME AN OBSESSION... BUT NOW THE FIRST ZYLON WARSHIP EDGES INTO HIS SIGHTS--

YES... I'M SURE NOW! I KNOW WHAT...WHO IS COMMANDING THE ZYLONS!

AND OLD STORIES GIVE WAY TO THE REALITY OF THE APPROACHING ZYLON FLOTILLA--

--AND FOR JED POOLE, THE REALITY IS DEADLY!

MAYDAY! ...MAYDAY ALREADY FOR PITY'S SAKES!

I'VE JUST BEEN RAMMED BY A ZYLON WARSHIP! ...HEAVY DAMAGE!

THIS IS TOMMY! IS THAT YOU, JED...?

THIS IS SKRIMSH! YOU GUYS ARE AS NUTS AS I AM!

SAVE THE PSYCHO-ANALYSIS, TROOPS... MY SHIELDS AND CANNON ARE OUT AND THERE'S A ZYLON BIRD AT NINE O'CLOCK--

--THAT'S MOVING LIKE A BIRD OF PREY!

I'VE GOT A FIX ON YOU, CAPTAIN!

JUST LET HER DRIFT FOR A MOMENT--!

NO TIME!

BESIDES... I'VE GOT A BETTER USE FOR THIS WORTHLESS CRATE!

WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT, JED POOLE LOCKS A COURSE DEAD-ON AT A HUGE ZYLON WARSHIP--
--AND EJECTS INTO COLD SPACE--DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF ANOTHER ONCOMING WARSHIP--
GOOD BLOODY SHOOTING, SKRIMSH!

--UNARMED AMID A HELL-RAIN OF LASER AND PHOTON TORPEDO FIRE!
HEY, NAVIGATOR! WHEN THAT HULK'S ION ENGINES BLOW INTO THAT WARSHIP...

...I'D JUST AS SOON BE OUT OF THE WAY, IF WE COULD ARRANGE IT!
WILL COMPLY, MON CAPITAINE!

BASE TO SNOWBIRD! DID JED...
I'M FINE, OLD GEEZER! ... ABOARD MY SHIP -- AND IT'S ABOUT TIME!

CAPTAIN! THE BOY'S BOUND FOR THE ZYLON'S' HOME SPACE--

--ON A SUICIDE RUN!
YES, WE'VE GOT YOUR SUBSPACE PROJECTION OF HIM, ZEKE --
--AND LORD HELP US, WE'RE FOLLOWING HIM IN!

I'LL TRY IT--

I FEEL YOU OUT THERE, BOYS... AND YOU FEEL ME, DON'T YOU...?
NOW STEER YOUR SHIPS JUST SO... MANEUVER THEM... THAT'S THE WAY...
YES--!
I FORCED THEM TO CRASH INTO EACH OTHER!...
WONDER WHAT OLD ZEKE MAKES OF THAT!

I SAW IT, BUT--IS IT POSSIBLE...?

ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THE HIVEWORLD'S SURFACE THEY CUT A PATH FOR HIM--

--BY... DESTROYING THEMSELVES!

"I CAN'T SEE INSIDE THE HIVE, BUT HE'S MADE IT INTO AN ACCESSWAY...

"...AND THERE MUST BE ZYLONS MASSING IN DEFENSE OF THEIR QUEEN--

"--LIKE A LEVEE BUILDING UP ON THE BANKS OF A RIVER!"

HERE HE COMES, MY CHILDREN... BE READY--

INDEED, IT SEEMS THE LITTLE SNOWBIRD IS THE ONLY SHIP IN THE GALAXY HEADED AWAY FROM THE ZYLON HIVE...

...AS HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF INSECTOID WARRIORS CONVERGE, SUMMONED BY A FORCE OR INSTINCT AS YET UNKNOWN--

-- AND THE ANCIENT, REFURBISHED STAR RAIDERS CRUISER FINALLY TOUCHES GROUND FAR BELOW THE OUTER SURFACE OF THE HIVEWORLD...

WELCOME, MY CHILD...!

YOU HAVE NO RIGHT...

...TO CALL ME...

...YOUR CHILD!

I'VE CALLED YOUR REAL CHILDREN HOME!

ALL OF THEM! ALL AT ONCE!

YOU KILLED MY PEOPLE... AND NOW I KNOW I WAS RIGHT--
THAT ONCE THEY WERE YOUR PEOPLE AS WELL! HOW... COULD THIS HAPPEN--?
I WAS A BIOLOGIST! I DISCOVERED THE WEAK-WILLED ZYLONS, AND BY BECOMING THEIR MOTHER, I MADE THEM GREAT!
BUT I BECAME OLD... AND THE GUATTIANS BECAME A THREAT! TOGETHER, THEY COULD HAVE OVER-THROWN ME... BUT YOU ALONE CANNOT!
I CAN!
I HAVE LONG SUSPECTED THAT THE QUEEN MOTHER OF THE ZYLONS WAS OF ANOTHER RACE...
...SKRIMSH'S RACE AS IT MAY TURN OUT, AND--
--PLEASE COME BACK AND GET ME! WE MAY HAVE ONE MORE JOB TO DO!

THEY'RE GONE! YOU DON'T COMMAND THEM ANY MORE!
MY LIFE-SUPPORT SYSTEM...I NEED IT... TO LIVE...

...YOU WOULD...
...DO THIS...
...TO THE LAST...
...OF THE GUATTIANS--?

YOU ARE NO MORE A GUATTIAN THAN ANY OF THESE LIVING MACHINES YOU CALL YOUR CHILDREN!...
AHHHH...

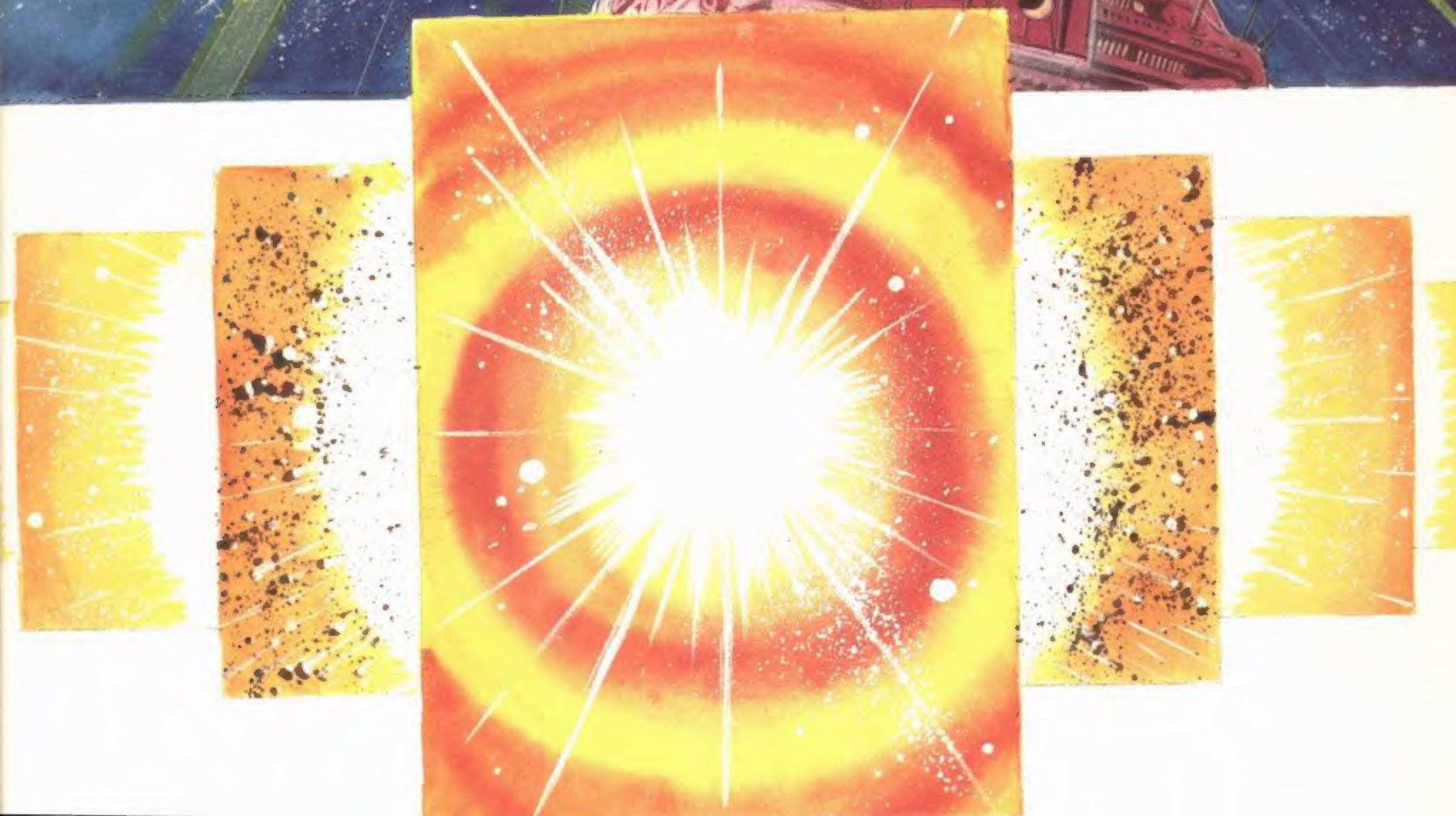
AT LEAST YOUR END IS A NATURAL ONE--
A HAPLESS WANDERER ALL HIS LIFE, THE CADET HAS WONDERED HOW A HEADY SURGE OF POWER COULD SO THOROUGHLY CORRUPT AN OTHERWISE HEALTHY SOUL...
...BUT NOW HE UNDERSTANDS! FOR A MOMENT, THE MUSCLE OF THE RULING RACE OF THE GALAXY -COURSES THROUGH HIS BEING-- TEARS AT HIS WHITE-HOT SOUL--
--BUT SOME SOULS ARE STRONGER THAN OTHERS!

STILL, THEY COME, SUMMONED BY THE VOICE OF AN UN-FAMILIAR MIND...

...BUT PROCEEDING NONE-THELESS, LIKE MACHINES THEMSELVES, UNCARING OF WHO DRIVES THEM, AS LONG AS THEY HAVE DIRECTIONS TO FOLLOW...

AND IF, IN WHAT PASSES IN ZYLONS FOR A **MIND**, THE THOUGHT OCCURS TO SOME THAT THIS IS **WRONG**...THAT THIS COURSE OF ACTION LEADS IN-EVITABLY TO **DIS-ASTER**--

--THEN THE THOUGHT OCCURS TO NO RESULT...



--WE THINK WE UNDERSTAND...

...AND WE'RE GOING HOME NOW--

--MY CHILD....